

PAST

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE PREHISTORIC SOCIETY



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Bronze Age and later activity at the Early Neolithic chambered tomb of Tresness, Sanday, Orkney

Tresness chambered tomb is located on the southern tip of the Tresness peninsula on the Isle of Sanday, Orkney. It is an exceptionally well-preserved example of a stalled cairn, but it is actively eroding into the sea with the entire southern extent of the cairn and part of the chamber lost. The site is being excavated as part of a wider reconsideration of this form of monument in Orkney. In 2019 we opened a trench over the chamber in the cairn, which revealed a series of deposits and structures reflecting the remodelling and reuse of the monument in the Bronze Age. These deposits are reported on here.

Firstly, we found the remains of a large rectangular cist that had been inserted in the northernmost compartment of the Neolithic chamber, which had been backfilled with roofing lintels and large slabs of stone at the end of its primary phase of use. Its northern edge is marked by a large *in situ* slab and the walls of the tomb form the east and west sides of the cist. The orthostats between compartments 1 and 2 were used to form the southern edge of the cist. A notch in the edge of one orthostat probably relates to this episode of reuse, as a large slab present on the surface at the start of the excavation would have fitted in this space and could have been held in place by the notch. What is extraordinary is that this stone and others from the backfill of the cist are fragments of the orthostats from the Early Neolithic stalled cairn. Indeed, further south in the chamber we found large extraction cuts through the Neolithic walls and backfill, and four of the orthostats were removed to their bases. This may not seem surprising, except that this is a landscape with many useable stones of similar size. It therefore appears that the Bronze Age builders went to great efforts to reuse aspects of the Neolithic monument to create their cist.

The contents of the cist had been extensively disturbed and pieces of neatly dressed capping stones were present

throughout the fill. A small quantity of poorly preserved human remains were recovered from around the location of the cist. These are from a child aged 7 to 10 years. There were also small fragments of cremated bone representing at least one individual. A radiocarbon date on the child's



Orthophoto of the excavations showing the possible outline of the cairn, with internal and external retaining walls marked, and the location of the cist



The walling inserted across the chambered tomb showing the edge of the Bronze Age cairn

remains indicates an Early Bronze Age date, as expected (1890–1701 cal BC at 95.4 % confidence: SUERC-90646, 3488 ± 27). A cache of cobble tools found on the surface near the cist may also have originally come from within it.

The overall shape of Tresness had been previously commented upon. Davidson and Henshall, in their 1989 classic *The chambered cairns of Orkney*, noted that ‘a later circular structure was placed centrally giving the site its present appearance of a round cairn overlying a rectangular monument’ (p. 163). Our excavations confirmed this observation, revealing two poorly built walls that appear to encircle the central cist. Significantly, these walls also reference the Neolithic architecture, with each wall overlying and following the orientation of a pair of orthostats extracted for the cist. The laying of multiple ard points and flaked stone bars across the uppermost surface of the remodelled cairn may also have indicated the ‘laying to rest’ of this site.

However, there is one final phase of activity documented at Tresness. As already noted, the cist was greatly disturbed and its lid smashed into pieces. These, along with other large stones, were tipped back into the cist, but only partly filled it and a significant depression was visible prior to the excavation. The character of this disturbance indicates that it was most likely caused by an antiquarian excavation in the 18th or 19th century. No records relating to this intervention have been located, but a communication in the *New Statistical Account of Scotland* (1845, 136) from Dr William Wood, the island’s physician and an antiquarian barrow digger, states ‘Tressness [sic...] contains several tumuli, which have never been examined’. Later antiquarian activity is, however, documented on the peninsula at the Broch at Wasso (Wasshow) which is just 500 m to the north of Tresness cairn. This was excavated by the prolific Orcadian antiquarian George Petrie in 1868. It is possible that he also examined the cist while he was there, although no reference has so far been found in his diaries.

Examination of the site’s Neolithic components will continue as soon as circumstances permit. In the meantime, a 3D model of the site can be viewed at: <https://skfb.ly/6RNPz>

Acknowledgements

We are very grateful to the landowners for letting us work at the site, to Historic Environment Scotland for Scheduled Monument Consent and to the Royal Archaeological Institute for financial support.

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and Vicki Cummings, University of Central Lancashire
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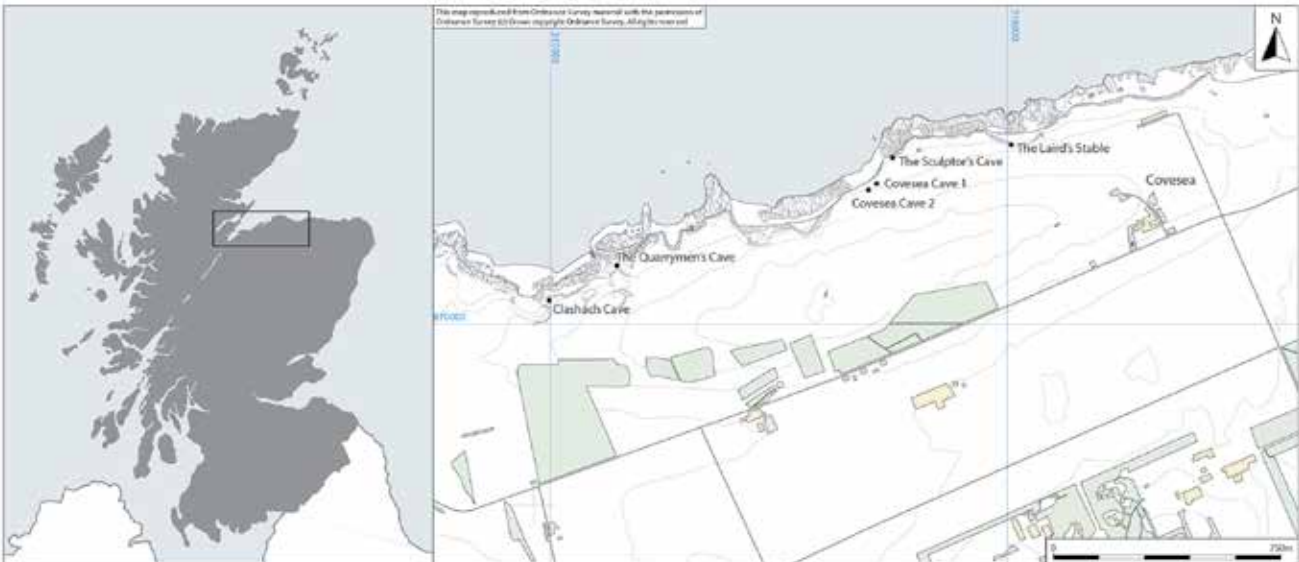
New light on the Covesea Caves, north-east Scotland

The sandstone cliffs flanking the south shore of the Moray Firth, north-east Scotland, conceal numerous sea caves. The best known is the Sculptor’s Cave, named after the Pictish symbols carved around its distinctive twin entrance passages. This cave has been excavated twice, first by Sylvia Benton in the late 1920s, and later by Ian and Alexandra (Lekky) Shepherd in 1979. Over recent years, a project led by two of the present authors (IA and LB) has brought together the results of these two excavations for analysis and publication.

Historically, the Sculptor’s Cave is best known for its metalwork, which formed the basis for John Coles’ ‘Covesea Phase’ of the Scottish Late Bronze Age. Human remains, including evidence for decapitation and the possible display of juvenile heads, were also thought to be associated with this Late Bronze Age activity. Records suggested that more than 1600 bones were recovered during Benton’s excavations, though almost all had been discarded after cursory examination. Later activity was evidenced by the

presence of Roman Iron Age personal and votive objects, including over 200 coins. Little was known, however, about the nature of this activity, its chronology and duration.

One major result of the recent work has been to radically overhaul the chronology of the site. Instead of two disconnected episodes in the Late Bronze Age and Roman Iron Age, AMS dating and Bayesian analysis have revealed that the cave was visited continuously from around 1000 cal BC to cal AD 400. During this time, deep deposits built up in the entrance passages, including numerous ephemeral structures controlling access to the cave. Nonetheless, two remarkable episodes still stand out. Between *c.* 1000 and 800 cal BC, juvenile remains were brought to the cave. Careful analysis of ‘bone lists’ compiled during the early excavations suggests that their bodies had been curated elsewhere, during which time they had decayed significantly, often losing small bones of the hands and feet. Indeed, when brought to the cave, they can best be thought of as mummy-bundles, adorned with bronze ornaments and gold-covered hair rings. Once



The Covesea Caves lie on the north-facing shore of the Moray Firth, with long views up the coast of Caithness and Sutherland. The caves are cut off from each other at high tide and are hard to access either by land or sea. Excavations have so far identified prehistoric activity in Caves 1 and 2, the Laird's Stable, and the Sculptor's Cave

in the cave they seem to have been kept (perhaps displayed) on stake-built structures in the twin entrance passages.

Yet funerary activity was not confined to the Late Bronze Age. Around 1000 years later, human remains once again entered the cave, but this time the mortuary rite was different. Instead of children, the Roman Iron Age bodies were predominantly adults, again associated with small items of personal adornment like pins and beads. The 'bone lists' suggest that these bodies entered the cave intact, but that certain bones, notably skulls and long bones, were subsequently removed. This provides a remarkable mirror image of the situation on Iron Age settlements, where the

same large bones frequently appear as isolated deposits. Indeed, the Sculptor's Cave may represent the first discovery of an *in situ* Iron Age excarnation site, where bodies were laid out to decay before bones could be selectively removed for ritual use in the world of the living. In addition, cut-marked vertebrae attest to the beheading of at least nine individuals inside the cave during the mid-third to early fourth centuries AD (see also Armit and Schulting in *PAST* 55).

The story of the Sculptor's Cave is certainly extraordinary, but recent work along the same coastline indicates that it is by no means unique. Archival work at National Museums Scotland and Elgin Museum identified human bones

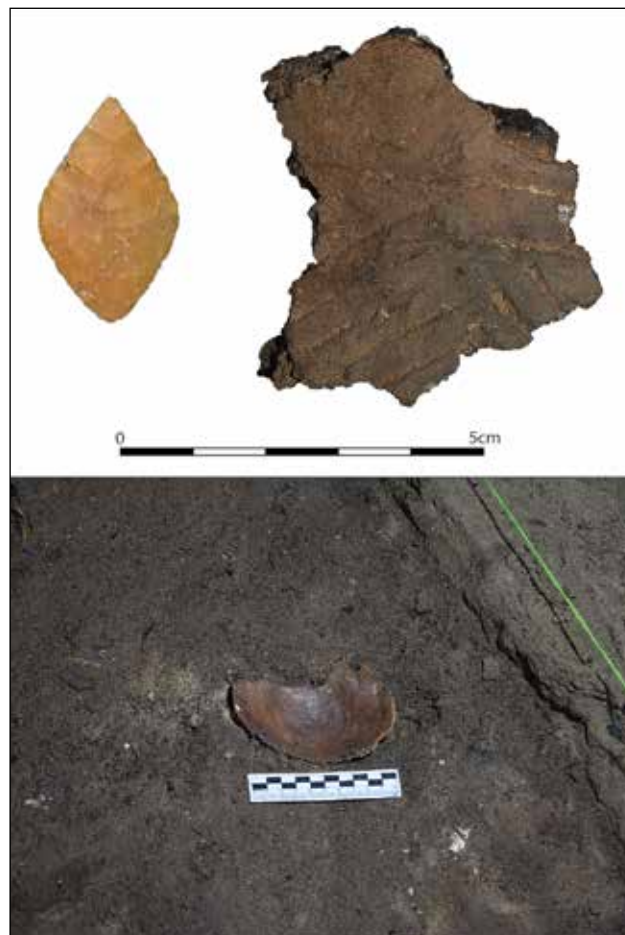
provenanced generally to 'the Covesea Caves', many from unrecorded excavations carried out in the 1960s. These discoveries led us to establish the Covesea Caves Project in 2014, which has carried out extensive excavations on several of the caves, as well as creating 3D digital models of these fragile environments (see a digital recreation of the Sculptor's Cave here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GnallHPh3Ts&feature=youtu.be>). So far, the most striking results have come from Covesea Cave 2, c. 100 m west of the Sculptor's Cave.

Excavations in Cave 2 began by exposing, cleaning and extending a large irregular trench dug by amateur archaeologists in the 1960s. This provided not only a preview of the complex stratigraphy, but also yielded many human bones, broadly contemporary with those in the Sculptor's Cave. Furthermore, trenches in both the Main Chamber and the recently discovered Wolf Chamber (entered via a low crawl space at the rear of the cave) revealed that Cave 2 has an even longer chronology of use than its neighbour. This begins with Early/Middle Neolithic mortuary activity, evidenced by juvenile skull fragments from the Wolf Chamber and a human tooth dating to 3892–3701 cal BC (4980±22 BP; SUERC-90587). Faunal and artefactual assemblages from this period have also been recovered, as well as a collapsed timber structure exposed at the base of the 1960s trench. Early Bronze Age activity is indicated by human remains redeposited in Late Bronze Age levels and by fragments of Beaker pottery, although no cultural deposits of this period have yet been found.

Late Bronze Age deposits, by contrast, are extensive throughout the Main Chamber, containing significant quantities of disarticulated human remains, some associated with arc-like, stake-built structures similar to those at the Sculptor's Cave. The level of processing and fragmentation seems quite unlike that at the Sculptor's Cave however; perhaps these bones belonged to a different community with distinct mortuary traditions, or perhaps the caves form complementary parts of a more extended landscape of funerary processing.

The Cave 2 faunal assemblage is also unusual, comprising a high proportion of red deer remains from the Neolithic onwards. Evidence for butchery shows that these do not represent natural deaths, and the deposition of a very large deer calvarium and (disassociated) mandible may suggest the special significance of red deer in the earliest phases of the cave's use.

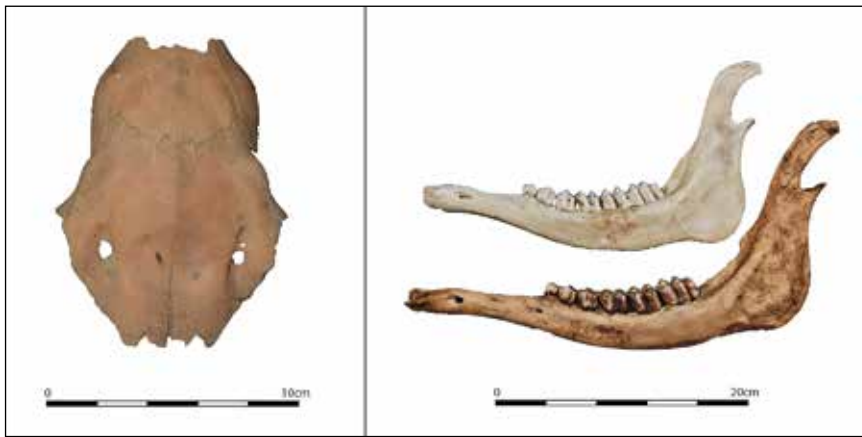
Cave 2 also saw (at least sporadic) human activity in medieval and later periods. One tiny pit (only c. 20 cm deep by 30 cm long) contained 65 faunal bones, including sheep, deer, herring gull, guillemot, cormorant, jackdaw, great auk and Atlantic cod. This motley collection was capped by a human pelvis fragment dating to the Early Bronze Age (2463–2236 cal BC; 3870±24 BP; SUERC-90582), presumably recovered from the earlier deposits. Might this reflect witchcraft or magic being practised in the cave during the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries AD?



Neolithic leaf-shaped arrowhead and sherd of Beaker pottery (top) retrieved from spoil of the 1960s excavations in Cave 2. The skull fragment (bottom) belongs to a Middle Neolithic juvenile individual. This image shows how close to the surface these deposits are



Late Bronze Age human remains from Cave 2. The juvenile pelvis fragment (top left) displays five radiating cutmarks, probably made using a flint tool. The adult mandible (top right) has fine cutmarks associated with defleshing. The metacarpal (bottom) represents one of several bones with surviving soft tissue (in this case ligaments, indicated by the red square), reflecting the extraordinary preservation within the cave



This red deer calvarium from Cave 2 (left) appears to have been deliberately deposited, while the large red deer mandible (bottom right) shows the size of Neolithic specimens compared to a modern deer mandible (photos: Alex Fitzpatrick)

From Neolithic funerary ritual to early modern magic, the Covesea Caves represent a remarkable and fragile resource. A new monograph by Ian Armit and Lindsey Büster, detailing the results of work at the Sculptor's Cave, is now available from the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland: *Darkness Visible: the Sculptor's Cave, Covesea, from the Bronze Age to the Picts* (<https://www.socantscot.org/product/darkness-visible/>), while further fieldwork and analysis by the Covesea Caves Project continues to shed light on the biographies of these extraordinary sites.

Acknowledgements

The Sculptor's Cave Publication Project, and associated fieldwork, was funded by Historic Environment Scotland. Subsequent excavations at the Covesea Caves have been funded by Historic Environment Scotland, Aberdeenshire Council and the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland. Preliminary analysis of the human bone assemblages was undertaken by Rick Schulting, University of Oxford, and Laura Castells-Navarro, University of Bradford.

Lindsey Büster, University of York (lindsey.buster@york.ac.uk), Ian Armit, University of York, Alex Fitzpatrick, University of Bradford

Archaeology on Furlough: archaeology in the time of COVID-19

When COVID-19 forced the UK into shutdown in March 2020, thousands of archaeologists found themselves unable to work. But when the government furlough scheme provided support for people, I realised there was a huge opportunity for volunteer archaeology projects of a kind currently not possible in either commercial units or academia. Over two weeks in April, I developed a suite of online projects for out-of-work archaeologists: Archaeology on Furlough (AoF).

In the two days after launch, over two thousand people visited the AoF website (www.archaeology-on-furlough.com), and over a hundred registered to volunteer. Participants included commercial field archaeologists and specialists, museum curators, retired archaeologists and postgraduate students.

For many, AoF was an opportunity to research and discuss unfamiliar topics. For some, it developed research skills they did not get to use in their day jobs. For a few, AoF was their first chance to write a report.

As I write this at the end of August 2020, the projects are coming to an end and the first teams have delivered their reports. Several groups are now preparing articles for formal publication. All the project outputs are progressively being made available via the AoF website, and will be permanently

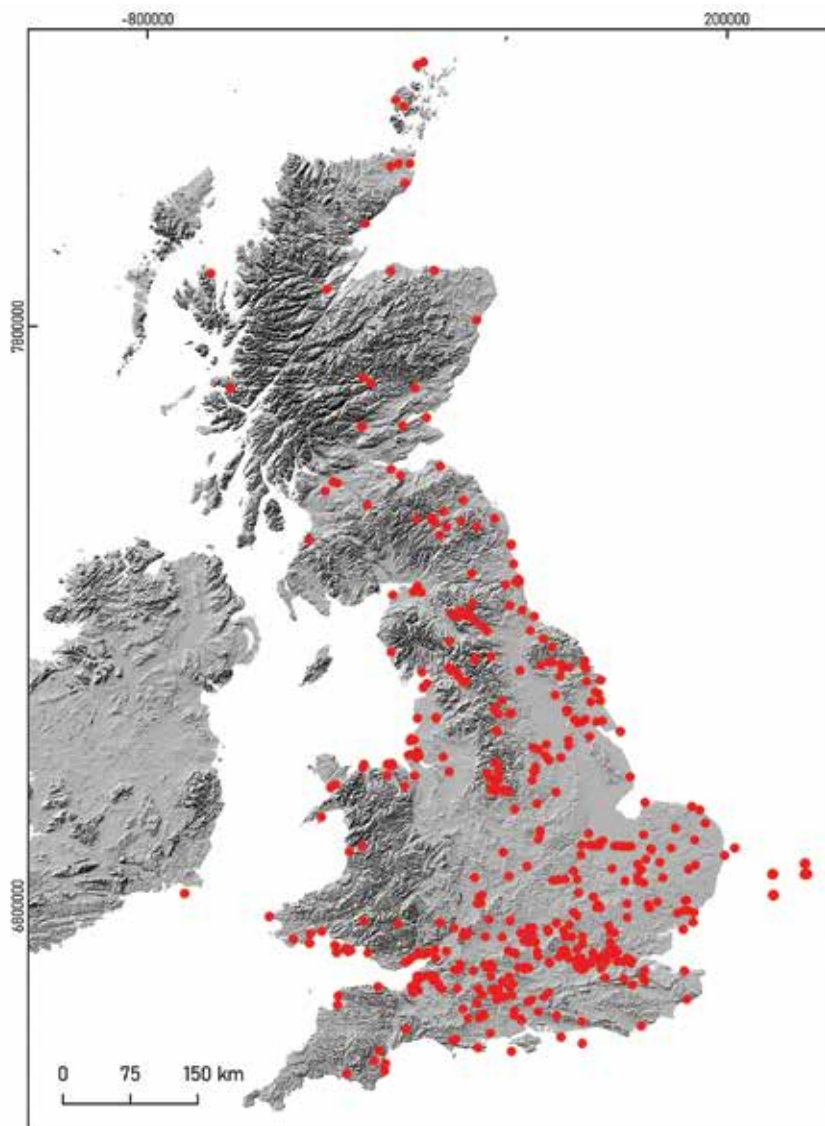
accessible via the Cambridge University Library's Apollo repository (<https://www.repository.cam.ac.uk/>).

Four of the AoF projects will be of particular interest to prehistorians.

Aurochs in Britain

Aurochs were a species of large wild cattle which became extinct in Britain during the Bronze Age. This project compiled a gazetteer of aurochs remains in Britain to shed new light on the environments aurochs preferred, and the types of ecological and hunting pressures that led to their disappearance.

The team has more than tripled the number of known sites of aurochs remains in Britain, finding over seven hundred locations – including several dredged from the Channel and North Sea. Some of the extraordinary finds include one animal with a stone axe embedded in its skull; a barrow containing 184 cattle skulls, among them curated aurochs ones; and two Roman sites and an Iron Age brooch with skulls which must have been curated for some 1500 years. The team's dataset will form a benchmark for decades to come, and they are now preparing an article and gazetteer for publication.



Aurochs remains in Britain and dredged from the sea, as identified by the AoF team

Guardians of Dartmoor

Dartmoor is one of Europe's best-preserved Bronze Age landscapes. Along with prehistoric settlements and field systems, there are hundreds of barrows. There has long been speculation about why barrows were placed where they were in the landscape. In this project, a team of experienced GIS users analysed data generously provided by the Dartmoor National Park HER, along with Environment Agency LIDAR data, to explore alternative interpretations. Mapping the least-cost paths between settlement clusters (the most energy-efficient way of travelling between two points, shown as yellow lines in the figure) revealed that many barrows were positioned close to these paths. Other barrows were placed in some of the least-visible parts of the landscape (dark areas in the figure).

Team members also scoured LIDAR images for potential archaeological features not currently recorded in the Dartmoor NP Historic Environment Record.

Emerging henges

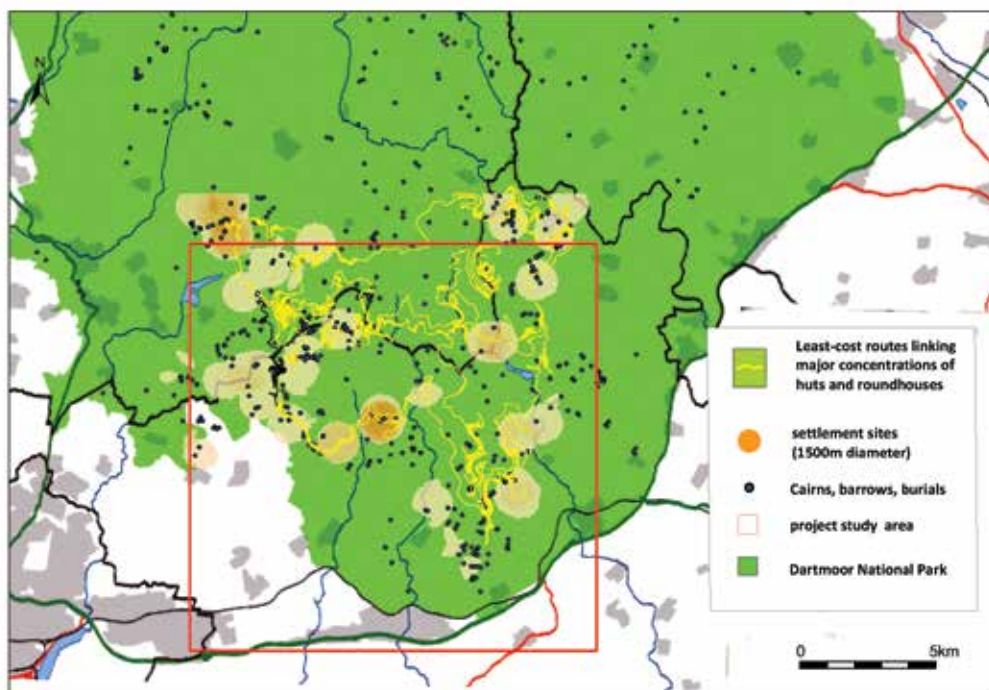
In *Henge Monuments of the British Isles* (2006), Jan Harding wrote that interpretation of henges had evolved little since the

1930s, partly because of a lack of excavation. That situation has changed rapidly in the last twenty years.

This project started a gazetteer of excavated examples in areas where henges are concentrated. The team found 85 sites which had been wholly or partly excavated. Fifteen had avenues or approach ways, while ten had portal stones standing at the entrance. In addition to henges with one, two and four entrances (which have been long recognised), the team also identified examples with three or no entry points. Evidence for burials, standing stones and timbers, pit circles, and radiocarbon dates were also collected.

Prehistoric decoration

Prehistoric art in Britain is curiously limited. It consists almost exclusively of geometric decoration. Before the Iron Age, even the motifs are limited mostly to triangles, diamonds, lines and dots: squares and crosses are uncommon. While altered states of consciousness (such as trances, drug-taking or exhaustion) are a popular explanation for the origins of geometric art, the team realised this does not explain why some periods show a profusion of decoration while others are noticeably plain, and also why only some objects are decorated.

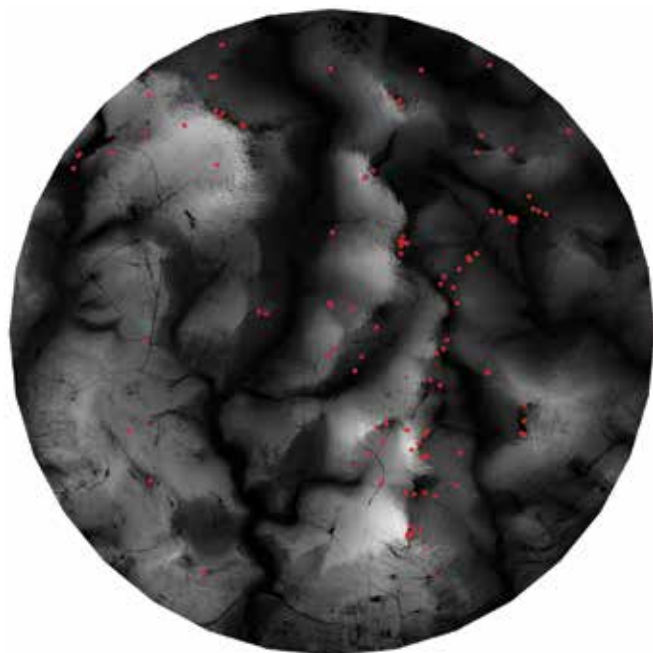


Southern Dartmoor, showing settlement clusters (brown), least-cost paths between them (yellow) and barrows and cairns (blue points). Many barrows appear close to the paths

The team is expanding current explanations with a new cognitive model which explores the motivations for pattern-making and transference between media. This model tackles why patterns from baskets get transferred onto pottery; why geometric motifs appear on Early Bronze Age metalwork only centuries after their appearance on Beaker pottery; and why cup and ring marks rarely appear outside rock art.

Taking it further

Beyond these prehistoric projects, other teams have focused on Roman, Saxon and medieval topics. In addition, one team undertook a review of digital technology for recording archaeological fieldwork. And finally, we ran a survey of all AoF volunteers on the experience of locating and using archaeological resources online. The results provide valuable information for authors and archaeological units to think about when publishing their findings, and also highlight some issues with traditional publishing routes.



A 'total viewshed' of a segment of southern Dartmoor, along with barrows and cairns (red dots). Widely visible parts of the landscape are shown in white; those difficult to observe are dark. Many barrows appear to be located within 'invisible' parts of the Dartmoor landscape

Archaeology on Furlough demonstrates just how much willing, motivated archaeologists can achieve if they are given the tools and encouragement. Like much about the coronavirus response nationally, AoF was thrown together quickly, and was not perfect. Nevertheless, it proved immensely popular, and I rapidly found myself coordinating over a hundred people in fourteen teams. Many of the volunteers have spoken of how much they loved participating in their groups, learning new things, and working with other archaeologists.

With the prospect of a second wave of coronavirus, I will finish with some tips for anyone thinking of running their own online projects. I am happy to share advice and the AoF templates.

Topics: I chose projects where I had some knowledge and could help volunteers obtain resources, answer their questions, and point people in productive directions.

Attracting volunteers: I set up a project website and promoted the projects through Facebook. The Prehistoric Society and BAJR were instrumental in attracting people.

Teams: the maximum viable size for online teams seemed to be 7–8 people, which allowed everyone to contribute. I set the projects up to be self-governing, although in practice I participated in about half the groups.

Preparation: before starting a project, I prepared a bundle of documents to help guide volunteers: a 4–5 page briefing document; a spreadsheet for data collection; a report template, with suggested headings and questions; and advice on how to manage the project and communicate online.

Communication: as the volunteers could only work remotely, I suggested they use a combination of online tools to keep in touch: video-conferencing for weekly catch-ups, chatrooms, shared drives to store documents, and the AoF Facebook page.

Acknowledgements

Many people and organisations helped make Archaeology on Furlough work. Foremost are the 120-odd volunteers, who brought such enthusiasm to the projects. The Prehistoric Society and BAJR were instrumental in spreading the word; thanks in particular to Tess Machling and David Connolly. Historic Environment Records and commercial archaeological units generously provided data, articles, grey literature reports and advice. A number of individuals kindly shared their personal databases and experience, with thanks to Brendan O'Connor, Ewan Chipping, Lizzy Wright and Peter Rowley-Conwy.

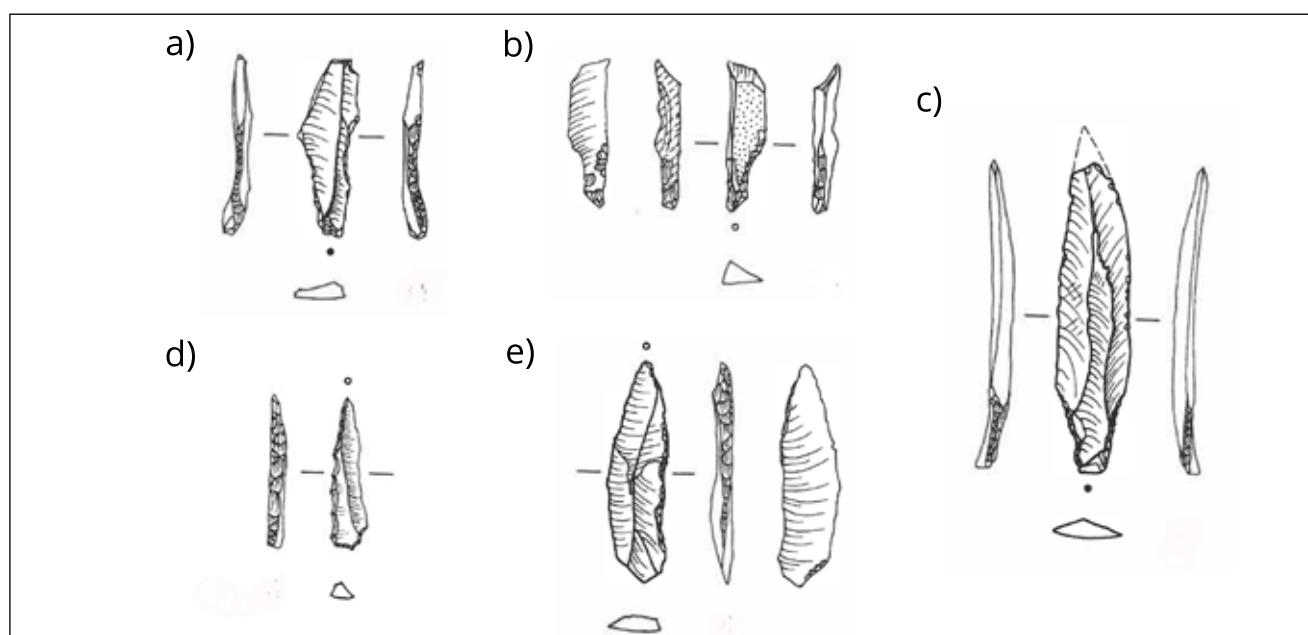
Rob Wiseman, University of Cambridge and Coordinator, Archaeology on Furlough (archaeologyonfurlough@gmail.com)

Understanding 'typologically awkward' assemblages in the Final Palaeolithic

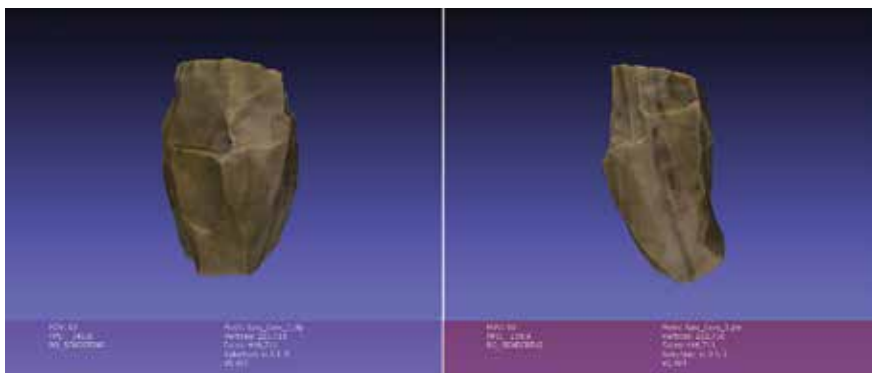
In the pursuit of understanding population structure throughout the Palaeolithic, a fundamental precondition is the unambiguous definition of analytical cultural units. Steeped in rich history, the definition of taxonomic units was of great concern to early practitioners, and can be traced back to the origins of the typological method and the identification of 'key sites'. With the almost exclusive dominance of lithics, stone tool variants have become premier proxies for the creation of these cultural units. However, traditional approaches to lithic analysis focusing on types and sites have often created uncertainties and ambiguities in the analytical units used. This has become particularly acute for the Old World record, whether this be the Middle and Upper Palaeolithic of Eurasia, the Epipalaeolithic of the

Levant, or the Final Palaeolithic of northern Asia. Here, recent theoretical as well as empirical work has demonstrated that, more often than not, traditional types do no longer serve as clear 'cultural index fossils'.

This problem is perhaps best exemplified for the Final Palaeolithic, that is to say the period from the first pronounced warming after the Last Glacial Maximum to the beginning of the Holocene (*c.* 16,000–11,700 cal BP), where there is a perceived diversification of cultural units, as seen through particular artefact types, or the co-occurrence of specific relative frequencies of these. These myriad artefact types, in turn, have been used as *fossiles directeurs* for the representation of prehistoric ethno-geographic variability reflected in named



Different named and unnamed point variants present at Häcklingen, Germany. A) Ahrensburgian point; B) Chwalibogowice point; C) Lyngby point; D) penknife point; E) an unnamed backed point variant. Scale 2:3



Screenshot of a model of a Palaeolithic blade core from Sassenholz (Germany). This model was produced in Agisoft Metashape Professional and can be downloaded from the Open Science Framework: <https://osf.io/72pwd/>

populations or ‘cultures’ (e.g. Hamburgian, Federmesser, Bromme, Creswellian).

While these attempts to catalogue the Final Palaeolithic have provided some initial structure for those interested in this period, there are a number of ‘typologically awkward’ assemblages, i.e. archaeological contexts which do not reflect one of these distinct and supposedly robust analytical cultural units. Excavated over two separate campaigns (1983–1985 and 1996–1997), the site of Häcklingen (Lüneburg, northern Germany) documents the presence of hunter-gatherer communities adopting a variety of named point types, including Penknife backed points and Ahrensburgian, Lyngby and Chwalibogowice tanged point variants. Despite the wealth of archaeological material, no absolute dates were produced, and with issues surrounding the contextual information of these artefacts, it is difficult to determine whether this site represents one or a number of occupations, by the same or differing groups.

Aided by a Prehistoric Society Research Grant, further investigations at Häcklingen are under way to better understand the nature of this ‘typologically awkward’ yet technologically curious site and its relationship to other securely stratified sites, including other ‘typologically awkward’ ones. New excavations at Häcklingen, and a complementary OSL-based dating strategy, will, we hope, bring clarity to its chronostratigraphic placing and provide a better understanding of the individuals who occupied this site. In addition, extensive technological analyses of a number of securely stratified and dated contexts, alongside a number of other ‘typologically awkward’ sites, have been carried out. At the time of writing, three archaeological contexts (in addition to Häcklingen) have been investigated. The first

was Rietberg 1/2/5 (North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany), a Federmesser site possessing a large number of backed points and AMS dates of 11935 ± 44 cal BP (Col 1038-1039), 11855 ± 66 cal BP (Col 1040) and 11808 ± 43 cal BP (Col 1041-1043). The second was the site of Sassenholz 78/82 (Lower Saxony, Germany), a surface collection classified as pertaining to the Bromme culture, but featuring a multitude of named backed and tanged point variants including Swidry, Ahrensburgian, Hamburgian and unclassified types. Finally, the much smaller surface collection site of Brümmerhof (Lower Saxony, Germany), assumed to be Bromme in nature, has also been investigated. In each of these instances, the tools, blades and cores have been extensively documented, and analysed through a multivariate statistical framework, so as to provide a more holistic and more detailed understanding of the technological makeup at each of these sites. Three-dimensional recording of the ‘typologically awkward’ artefacts also permits greater scrutiny of these sites by the wider archaeological community. Upon completion, all models will be uploaded to an open repository.

While this project may not be able to deconstruct the current typological framework for the Late Glacial period, it will highlight, through the analysis of ‘typologically awkward’ contexts, and particularly that of Häcklingen, the ambiguity still plaguing archaeologists and those interested in this period. It will highlight the problems of using individual artefacts as sole markers for cultural units, and provide a point of reflection as to how we begin to catalogue artefacts in the future.

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Membership

We would kindly like to remind you that subscriptions will be due on the 1st January 2021. Please do renew using the form included, or directly online. If you are a UK tax payer, remember that the subscription is eligible for Gift Aid, which is a valuable source of income for the Society. If you are unsure about anything, or indeed cannot remember whether you have paid your dues for 2020, please email prehistoric@ucl.ac.uk. In the current climate, online payment is preferred if at all possible.

We hope you agree that with the Proceedings (now also freely available online to members), newsletter, discounts on Society volumes, free lectures and many outings, membership is still well worth the subscription fee. Please do continue your support for our many activities and the research we fund. Thank you!

Programme of meetings: updates

Due to the ongoing situation with COVID-19, our annual programme of meetings is mostly moving online. Details (and instructions for how to log in) will soon be confirmed for many of these events, so please keep an eye out on: <http://www.prehistoricsociety.org/events/>

Dr Sophia Adams' lecture on the Havering hoard unfortunately had to be moved to next year.

<i>Date</i>	<i>Venue</i>	<i>Details</i>
2020		
Wed 21 October, 5:00pm	TBC	The 19th Sara Champion Memorial Lecture <i>Title tbc</i> , by Dr Rachel Crellin, Leicester University Followed by presentation of the Society Undergraduate Dissertation Prize
Tues 27 October, 7:00pm	TBC	4th Annual Pitt Rivers Lecture <i>The origins of our species</i> , by Professor Chris Stringer, Natural History Museum
Monday 2 November, 7:30pm	Online, details TBC	<i>The Pocklington chariot burials</i> , by Paula Ware, MAP Archaeological Consultancy Annual joint Scarborough Archaeological and Historical Society / Prehistoric Society lecture
Saturday 7 November, 2:00pm	Online, details TBC	<i>Prehistoric Archaeology at Barnham, Suffolk</i> , by Professor Nick Ashton, British Museum Annual joint Norwich and Norfolk Archaeological Society / Prehistoric Society lecture.

Clark medal awarded to Frances Healy

Frances Healy has been awarded the Grahame Clark Medal for 2020 by the British Academy, in recognition of her research on the British Neolithic. This prestigious honour comes after a distinguished career spanning many sites, themes and approaches. Among many other major contributions, Frances played a central role in bringing the long-running excavations of the extensive causewayed enclosure complex at Hambledon Hill to publication (published with Roger Mercer in 2008) and then in the far-reaching *Gathering Time* project on the dating of causewayed enclosures (published in 2011 with Alasdair Whittle and Alex Bayliss). She is first author of the Historic England Scientific Dating report on Grime's Graves flint mines (2014) and, with Jan Harding, published the Raunds Area Project monographs for English Heritage (2008 and 2011). For many years an experienced project manager, she has been Chair of the Lithic Studies Society (she is an internationally-respected authority on British prehistoric lithics), a Vice-President of the Prehistoric Society and a CBA Trustee; she is also an Honorary Research Fellow at Cardiff University. Congratulations to Frances on this award!



Alistair Barclay and Frances Healy in Paris, discussing the ¹⁴C sampling strategy for the French collective tombs of Bury and Les Mournouards as part of the *Times of Their Lives* project (photo: A. Whittle).

Alasdair Whittle (whittle@cardiff.ac.uk)

Europa 2021: People and Society in late Prehistoric Europe University of Leicester, 11–13 June 2021 (provisional dates)

We have postponed the Europa Conference that was due to take place this June at the University of Leicester in honour of Professor Colin Haselgrove. Our conference organisers worked extremely hard to reschedule it and we will now meet in Leicester a year later, in 2021, with the same programme. The provisional dates are the 11–13 June, and we will confirm these with you later in the year (please see our website for more updates).

Confirmed speakers include: Prof Janet Montgomery and Dr Tom Moore (Durham), Prof Ian Armit (Leicester); Dr Vincent Guichard (Bibracte); Dr Mel Giles (Manchester), Dr Katharina Rebay-Salisbury (Vienna), Prof Nico Roymans (Amsterdam) and Dr Fraser Hunter (National Museums Scotland). The Europa lecture itself will be titled: *New places, new faces, new horizons: what shaped European societies at the end of prehistory?*.

Museums and COVID-19

Most readers will be aware that many museums have had a particularly trying time during 2020. The sector is patchily funded at best, particularly in the regions, with many local and regional institutions having suffered cuts in funding over many years. Most museums are dependent on their visitors, either from ticket sales, or from secondary spend in shops and cafés, let alone the myriad ways of fundraising from room hire and weddings through to events and sponsorship. It was inevitable that the national lockdown and its aftermath would have a huge effect. However, it is a resilient sector, filled with creative and highly adaptive problem solvers. The existing trend towards making collections available online and communicating with museum-goers via social media has come into its own.

Some institutions found themselves at a particularly sticky point. As an example, Dorset Museum was halfway through the very large National Lottery Heritage Fund project *Tomorrow's Museum for Dorset*. This has involved rebuilding a large portion of the museum, providing new state of the art galleries and secure on-site climate-controlled storage. In early March, the build was pretty much on schedule, despite high winds having got in the way of using a very large tower crane which was looming over Dorchester town centre. We were embroiled in text writing and final object selection for displays. Within days, most of the public-facing staff were on furlough and the crane stood idle while the builders valiantly attempted to work out how they could keep things moving on a building which was missing its top floor.

Gradually the intricacies of social distancing on a building site were bottomed out, we weathered the sporadic concrete supply and got over a chronic lack of plaster. By some miracle, the opening date is now only four and a half months behind schedule. The project staff managed to keep working on the redisplay plans, although some objects, such as a recently acquired Late Iron Age copper alloy tankard, may not now make it through conservation in time to go on display for opening. All the while though the bills have mounted and funding sources dried up. By the time you read this we are



The new museum atrium, which did finally obtain a roof (© Dorset Museum)



A later Bronze Age anvil from East Dorset. Recently acquired, having fallen outside the provisions of the Treasure process, the anvil has traces of gold on the surface of its beak and will be displayed in the new exhibition (© Dorset Museum)

very hopeful of having received a much-needed financial lifeline from NLHF and Arts Council, who are to be commended for their level-headed helpfulness. At the time of writing we have a £1.2m hole in the budget, which if it is not plugged would be an existential threat to Dorset Museum and its collections. If this sounds alarming, we take little comfort in not being alone in our predicament.

What is perhaps slightly less obvious has been the behind the scenes effects on collections management and research. Dorset Museum's storage facilities have always had their issues (as anyone who has ever visited the archaeology store in a redundant church will be aware). Now, in the archaeology department we are dealing with attempting to work safely in awkward spaces, whilst largely reliant on a volunteer workforce, who won't mind me saying that they often fit a 'vulnerable' demographic. We are not sure when it will be safe for them to get back to work as previously. We found ourselves unable to assist researchers who were half-way through projects and reliant on access to our collections. Thankfully we have started to find ways to help a limited number of researchers – all of whom are working on prehistory-related projects. Many museums have found that they are just not in a position to deal with this.

Additionally, the processes around Treasure cases grind onward, although there has been some flexibility around us deferring decisions which would mean us having to commit to future expenditure. We have had the added issues of attempting to work out how to react to the potential export of an important Dorset mosaic, on which the clock is ticking. All the while, archaeological archives from around the county are not being deposited with us. At some point we will have to attempt to catch up on all of this; we cannot be alone, so please bear with museum staff who will be doing their best. We are planning for a rather different future than we envisaged, but new ideas for safe visiting and online events are being developed all the time, as is the case in museums across the country. Please support them when you can.

Clare Randall, Vice-Chair, Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society, who own and operate Dorset Museum (editor@dorsetcountymuseum.org)

King COVID: how has the pandemic affected UK universities?

Maybe it's precisely because I'm an archaeologist, but I struggle at present to get any long-term perspective on the impacts of the pandemic on archaeology teaching at UK universities. As the current chair of UAUK (University Archaeology UK), a hub which comprises all the heads of Archaeology departments and teaching units, you might think I would be well placed to do precisely that. The fact is that the situation is fast-moving. There has been a changing panorama of impacts and responses across the sector since March 2020, which has so far not settled down.

What have been the practical impacts since March? Either side of Easter, teachers of archaeology classes grappled with online delivery and, in many cases, experimented with lecture 'capture' for the first time. As universities closed their doors and students returned home, so remote working became the 'new normal' and colleagues battled with poor sound, editing, prehistoric internet speeds and upload times. New processes for assessing and examining students were rapidly implemented so that students could graduate 'virtually' in the summer; the 'flipped' model of teaching was rolled out with lectures being 'chunked' into shorter asynchronous lectures and greater online experimentation with online quizzes, blogs, and much else besides. Behind the scenes, academics were deluged in a sea of emails as face-to-face communication was substituted by Zoom invites and Teams chats. Under the circumstances, how would workplace equality be ensured? How could a sense of collegiality and open communication be maintained among staff and students?

There were external threats too. Some archaeology departments, already weakened by declining admissions, came under close scrutiny during the course of the year by nervous university administrations. How many archaeology departments might be lost if UK student numbers declined further or foreign students (on which some university finances had been predicated) decided to stay away? All the talk was of 'financial sustainability', loss of posts, reduced staff contracts, frozen finances – the language of academic impoverishment. Archaeology departments faced particular challenges, among them fieldtrips to visit sites, practical work such as handling of objects and access to equipment for small group training and laboratory classes. And what about Masters and PhD students and their access to fieldwork and museum collections?

One major concern was how fieldwork (a standard element of all UK archaeology courses) could be delivered in a socially-distanced world with (in some cases) the hovering threat of reduced funding. While remote methods of delivery can be successful in enhancing access and inclusivity (a 2018 special edition of the *Journal of Field Archaeology* gives a useful overview; see also Dig Ventures virtual online dig: <https://digventures.com/courses/>), they are usually considered to be complementary and not a substitute for traditional fieldwork training. Lockdown in the UK and globally prevented institutions from running their mandatory field training placements, though some are now (September 2020) taking place again with stringent social distancing rules in place.



Student fieldwork at Durham University (UK) underway in 2018 at Auckland Castle (County Durham). Will training on excavations like this become a thing of the past?

Travel to and from excavations is one very practical difficulty, and the opportunities for international students vary case-by-case. At UAUK we debated solutions to these and many other issues; we set up shared archaeology resources, commissioned short testimonial videos to help bolster student recruitment and tried to support each other wherever we could.

Many UK archaeology staff also manage large grants or participate in collaborative projects and this was a further cause for concern. I have two research assistants working on sites affected by medieval earthquakes in Italy, Spain and Portugal; both were furloughed, but COVID continues to allow and then suddenly shut down access to the regions they work in, with changing advice over quarantine and insurance arrangements. And so, like many others, my project is now extending further into the future, with deadlines shifting and travel arrangements in doubt. The sense of uncertainty over when and how projects will be completed is ongoing, particularly where there is substantial fieldwork involved. One Horizon 2020 grant I am involved with has partners in four European countries. It is hard to plan for fieldwork and project meetings when different countries are involved, each with their own institutional and national processes.

As I write, the UK situation is changing once again. A release in the cap on students going to university in October has seen Archaeology admissions rise dramatically in some UK universities. This will put particular pressure on classrooms and 'face-to-face' contact, and on fieldwork capacity. But after a period of firefighting, some of the benefits of COVID are perhaps beginning to emerge. In a pre-COVID world, two key deficiencies identified in the heritage workforce were 'the ability to manage own time and prioritise own tasks' and 'handling digital collections and data'. These are the kinds of technical and management skills which our teaching can now surely hope to address much better than before. There will be losses and gains, that much at least is certain.

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An analysis of the Furze Platt handaxes at the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, Canada

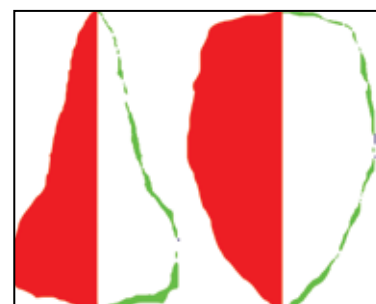
In 1910, the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM), Toronto, Canada purchased a large collection of Lower Palaeolithic handaxes from the famed British collector Llewellyn Treacher. He was particularly active in the Middle Thames region in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, where commercial gravel pits had revealed several extremely prolific Acheulean (handaxe-bearing) sites. Foremost among these sites was Furze Platt, notable not only for the sheer number of handaxes collected during the working life of the gravel pits (over 1500), but also for producing the largest ever handaxe found in Britain (a staggering 30.6 cm), which is currently on display in the Natural History Museum. Despite the prominence of the site, its early history is poorly documented. It is known that the earliest working at Furze Platt took place at Cooper's Pit, situated slightly to the north of the much better known Cannoncourt Farm Pit. Treacher is thought to have collected 500–600 handaxes from Cooper's Pit, yet none remain in the collections of UK museums. The ROM collection would appear to solve the mystery of the missing Cooper's Pit handaxes, as they were acquired early in the history of the site, and they approach the large number of handaxes collected.

The only direct study made of the ROM handaxes was an unpublished undergraduate dissertation of 1978. The results of this study were surprising: they seemed to suggest that the ROM Furze Platt collection was overwhelmingly in abraded condition and included almost equal numbers of ovate and pointed types, quite unlike the relatively fresh, large and pointed handaxes familiar from Cannoncourt Farm Pit only a few tens of metres to the south. Shelley Cranshaw, in her 1983 monograph on handaxes and cleavers, tentatively interpreted this as evidence of a handaxe assemblage which was at least partially derived from the higher, older Boyn Hill terrace. Hers was the only published work to attempt to interpret the ROM Furze Platt handaxes, although she had not been able to travel to Canada to see them first-hand. Preliminary work reassessing these two studies discovered a small but significant methodological error in the 1978 dissertation, which had exaggerated the 'ovate' component of the collection. This was significant because the 'pointedness' of a handaxe assemblage, along with other factors such as elongation, tip shape, refinement and typology, can be chronologically significant and had certainly influenced Cranshaw's interpretation of the ROM implements.



Left: Historical maps of the Furze Platt area, redrawn from the OS maps for Berkshire

Below: Schematic of hand axe symmetry, created using FlipTest software



The present study attempts to resolve both the provenance and the character of the ROM Furze Platt handaxes by studying the material directly. Several new findings have emerged from the preliminary analysis. Most significant is that three separate groups can be identified based on collection dates annotated onto the implements: an earlier group, collected between 1889 and 1897, a later group collected 1909–1910, and a large undated group collected at an unknown date but accessioned in 1910. This information was crucial in working out provenances. Whilst previous studies had correctly noted that Cooper's Pit was the earliest working at Furze Platt, interrogation of the scant documentary evidence available suggested that that pit had closed ten years prior to 1909, and therefore could not be the source of the later group of artefacts. Cannoncourt Farm Pit was suggested to have opened 'around' 1909; this was confirmed by analysing historical OS maps of the area. The 'later' group must therefore have originated from Cannoncourt Farm Pit. The early group probably represents the earliest collection from Cooper's Pit, interpreted as a derived or mixed handaxe assemblage. This was mostly based on the abraded condition of the handaxes, but their morphology and typology is also consistent with other nearby sites from the higher (Boyn Hill) terrace. The undated group, the largest fraction of

the collection, may well represent the errant Cooper's Pit handaxes as had previously been suggested, based in part on their large number and broad similarity to early descriptions of the material provided by Treacher.

Crucially, the 'undated' and 'late' groups have morphometric and typological characteristics typical of other Lynch Hill terrace (MIS 9) handaxe sites, including a dominance of pointed shapes coupled with a co-occurrence of ficon (biconcave edged) and cleaver (chisel tipped) handaxes. The figure illustrates the remarkably high degree of symmetry found in some of these implements. The 'early' group, aside from being notably different in condition, also lacked the types which typically occur in MIS 9 deposits. These results add more weight to the idea that handaxe forms are chronologically significant and can be used to differentiate and date deposits where other evidence is lacking.

These findings will be incorporated into an ongoing doctoral project which aims to characterise MIS 9 handaxes in order to assess transitions in culture, society and behaviour in the latest Lower Palaeolithic.

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Gourimadi Archaeological Project: excavating the earliest prehistoric habitation in southern Euboea, Greece

The site of Gourimadi is located in the southern part of the island of Euboea, on a hill with excellent vistas of the entire region, including east Attica and the northern Cycladic islands of Andros, Tinos, Giaros and Kea. When surface survey also revealed a rich, multi-period assemblage, it became evident that further investigations here would allow us to understand more about the long-term development of settlement and contact networks in this part of the Aegean.

The southern section of the Greek island of Euboea has had a trajectory of development different from the rest of the island. In prehistoric times, this area, also known as the Karystia, has had much more in common with the insular world of the Cycladic archipelago to the south and with coastal east Attica than with the rest of the island it belongs to. The preserved material culture indicates the merging of influences from both the Cyclades and the mainland.

The sustained survey efforts that began around the middle of the 20th century and intensified in the late 1970s, alongside intermittent, usually rescue, excavations, have produced a large body of evidence for prehistoric activities in this part of the Aegean. The data show that the Final Neolithic (FN, *c.* 4200–3300 BC) and Early Bronze Age (EBA, *c.* 3300–2100 BC) were the periods with the most intensive prehistoric occupation in the Karystia, as well as showing active participation of the local communities in the Aegean trade/exchange networks of the time. That the

Karystia was an important nodal point in these networks is particularly evident from the large quantities of obsidian found in prehistoric contexts in this area. The closest source of obsidian is the Cycladic island of Melos, approximately 120 km to the south, and more than 99 % of obsidian found in southern Euboean contexts comes from there. Since the only way to obtain obsidian would have been by maritime travel, the large quantities reveal the likely existence of fairly frequent contacts between the inhabitants of the Karystia and their neighbours to the south.

The Cycladic influences can be felt not only in the presence of raw materials, but also in the stylistic features of some material assemblages, especially pottery, that likely reflect the desire of the local populations to express in visible ways their belonging to a particular identity group. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the burials of nine EBA individuals in the Karystia's Agia Triada cave. The composition of the material assemblage found with these burials clearly reflects Cycladic practices and influences, as seen at a number of contemporaneous EBA cemeteries excavated in the Cyclades (e.g. Chalandriani on Syros).

The Agia Triada cave is also significant because it produced the evidence for the earliest human presence in this part of Greece, dated to the first half and the middle of the fifth millennium BC (Late Neolithic). These finds, represented by distinct pottery decorated with light-coloured geometric



Left, top: Euboea and southern Euboea in their geographical context; bottom: the view to the south from Gourimadi (images: Rebecca Seifried and Žarko Tankosić)



Above: Example of 'white-on-dark' Neolithic ceramics from the Agia Triada Cave (photo: Fanis Mavridis)



Below: View of architectural remains in Gourimadi trenches 1 and 3 at the end of the 2020 excavation season (image: Denitsa Nenova and Hüseying Öztürk)

motifs painted before firing on the generally dark pottery surfaces ('white-on-dark') also show Cycladic influences. They are reminiscent of the ceramics found on the islet of Saliagos, located between the Cycladic islands of Paros and Antiparos. The presence of this type of archaeological material only in the cave was puzzling and was generally interpreted as signs of a short visit, rather than more permanent habitation in southern Euboea during the earlier part of the fifth millennium BC. The excavation at Gourimadi, however, fundamentally changed that perspective.

The site of Gourimadi is located at the south-eastern edge of the Katsaronio plain, c. 6 km from Karystos. The site was discovered and recorded during an earlier Norwegian survey of the area. It was immediately recognised as important, based on the size and composition of the artefact assemblage collected from its surface (e.g. large quantities of obsidian including more than 50 projectile points, pottery from multiple phases, metallurgical remains in the form of small quantities of slag and a well-preserved copper axe, etc.). The location of the site has excellent defensive properties with unobstructed vistas of most sections of southern Euboea, east Attica, and the northern Cycladic islands of Andros,



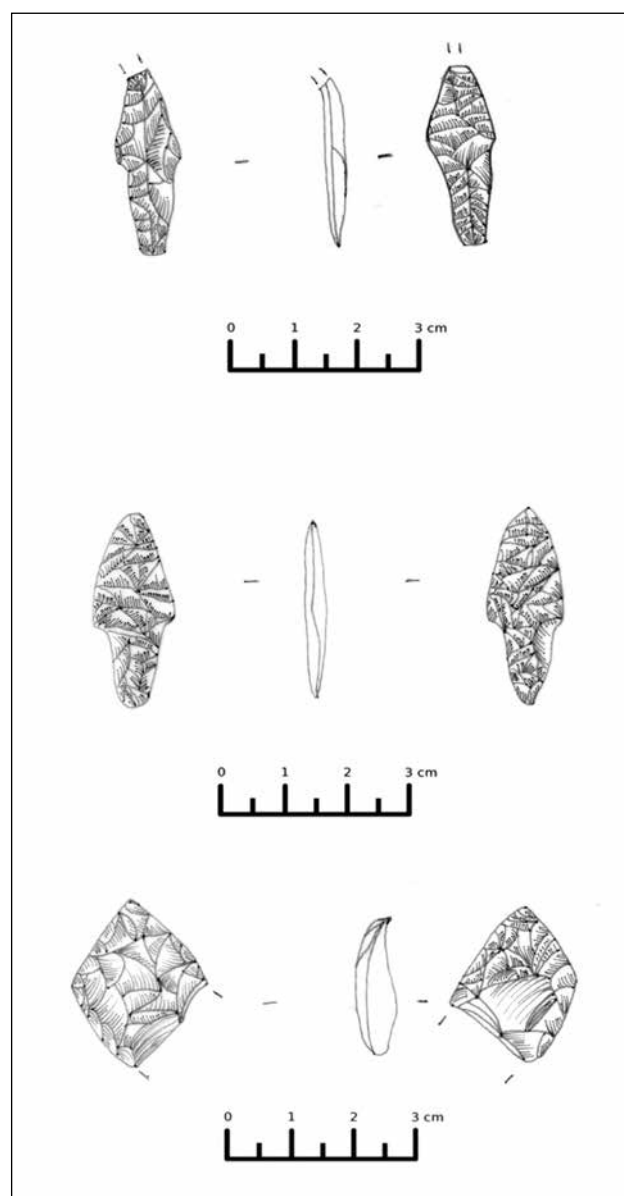
Tinos, Giaros and Kea and, on clear days, of Kythnos, Serifos, Mykonos and Syros, too. According to the size of the archaeological surface scatter, the maximum extent of the site is *c.* 4 ha.

The first phase of the Norwegian Institute at Athens' excavations of Gourimadi started in 2018 and is scheduled to continue until 2022. Concluding with the summer of 2020, we have opened four trenches, all on the relatively flat summit of the Gourimadi hill. All four trenches have produced evidence of prehistoric building remains and many artefacts, chiefly ceramics, lithics (chipped and polished, the former overwhelmingly made of obsidian), terracotta figurines, animal and human bones, and similar. The most significant remains, however, come from trenches 1 and 3.

The architectural remains that span the summit of the site consist of both straight and curving walls, some of which are preserved to a height of more than eight courses. The walls were built of stone using mud mortar as the connective material. Based on the stratigraphic position of the walls and the associated material culture, we have evidence for multiple building phases. The material, particularly the pottery, indicates that the site had been occupied through the LN and FN as well as at least the initial stages of the EBA, which is a time span of at least 1500 years, although it is unclear whether there are any hiatuses in occupation.

The lithic assemblage found at Gourimadi consists of tools as well as evidence for almost the complete reduction sequence at the site. This strongly suggests robust local production. Moreover, concluding with the 2020 season, we have collected more than 200 arrowheads from Gourimadi, making this the largest assemblage of such tools found in prehistoric Greece thus far. Such a large number of arrowheads offers clues about the activities practised at the site (e.g. hunting, warfare, and similar).

Pottery is certainly the most numerous and perhaps the most significant type of find from Gourimadi, as it allows us to follow the chronology of occupation at the site. The most interesting are the strata with pottery dated to the first half of the fifth millennium BC. Although we still do not have radiocarbon dates to confirm this dating, the stylistic features of the pottery resemble assemblages dated to this time elsewhere in the Aegean (e.g. at the site of Ftelia on Mykonos). The ceramics also have parallels with those from the Agia Triada cave. Hence, this is the first LN open-air site recorded in southern Euboea. By extension, this is the first solid evidence that this part of the Aegean was inhabited before the second half of the fifth millennium BC, during the



Selection of arrowheads from Gourimadi (drawings: Aikaterini Psoma)

FN. All this makes Gourimadi not only the earliest currently known site in the region, but also a key site for understanding prehistoric developments in the Aegean, particularly those related to the initial peopling of the Cycladic islands and prehistoric obsidian exchange networks.

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