

Prehistory Section Update

For Hebden Bridge Local History Society AGM on Wednesday 24th October 2012

As usual we have attended a number of lectures and seminars, mostly at the University of Bradford, but also York and Huddersfield: (For brevity I have left off the academic titles and posts of the speakers described below. Most are national and international figures. It isn't really possible to summarise these talks. If you want to know more please ask.)

- Mike Parker-Pearson described the latest thinking on the Stonehenge/ Durrington Walls complex, where phases of construction may relate to before and after the arrival of the Beaker People. And there was the suggestion that many of the stones used at Stonehenge were actually being reused, as a stone circle elsewhere was dismantled and moved to a more auspicious site.
- Jane Kenney discussed latest views of the Neolithic in North Wales where revised carbon dates and reinterpretations of some features have cast doubt on the current model of Neolithic spread from the south-east. Movements around the coast seem to offer a more coherent account.
- Chantal Conneller described continuing work at Star Carr, where agricultural drainage is rapidly drying out the archaeological layers and compromising the preservation of wood, bone and antler artefacts. We made a visit to other excavations around the former Lake Flixton later in the year, guided by the director Nicky Milner.
- At York, Paul Preston outlined his work on the Mesolithic use of flint and chert in the South Pennines. This has led to a potentially very useful contact and we hope to be involved in future work with him and Penny Spikins.
- Going a hundred times further back into the past, Nick Ashton described the Ancient Human Occupation of Britain Project which is working on sites at Happisburgh in Norfolk, dated to seven and eight hundred thousand years ago. He described the methods of dating using paleomagnetism, pollen and the remains of beetles and voles. Differences in the flint assemblage seem to indicate a change from homo antecessor to homo heidelbergensis, but there is no evidence that fire had been controlled at that time.
- Janet Montgomery outlined her work on a large sample of Neolithic teeth - using oxygen and strontium isotope analyses - in an attempt to determine the origins of the Beaker people. She discussed some of the anomalies thrown up by this method.
- Wolfgang Neubauer described the Neolithic fortified enclosures of Lower Austria as they relate to continental movements of people, resources and ideas. There is a very ambitious experimental archaeology programme getting underway with CGI drawn from the film industry.

We were invited to attend a day conference at Jerusalem Farm called by *'Moors For The Future'*, and involving Yorkshire Peat Partnership, the Yorkshire Dales National Park, the Peak District National Park, English Heritage, West Yorkshire Archaeology and Archive Service, Calderdale Council, Pennine Prospects and major moorland contractors. This arose essentially from the difficulties attending brush-cutting which we had highlighted previously, when a

Scheduled Monument was damaged by brash-cutting plant. Conflicting aims were well aired and a provisional protocol for future contracts was outlined. We led a walk over Midgley Moor in the afternoon so that discussion of the problems could take place in front of evidence.

One useful outcome of this conference was that our credibility with West Yorkshire Archaeology and Archive Service has increased considerably. The head of WYAAS, Ian Sanderson, admitted that he had largely ignored the West Yorkshire uplands because 'anything there would be fairly safe'. However it had become clear to him that because of issues such as brash-cutting, and the increase in planning applications for wind turbines, the West Yorkshire Historic Environment Record, the statutory database, was urgently in need of updating. We are presently occupied in examining and correcting such records as are on the HER and submitting a large number of new ones. The substantial body of data we have passed on previously is now finding its way onto the official record.

A meeting of Treesponsibility was attended by invitation, and we explained that tree planting might compromise below-ground archaeology, something that they had not considered. In actual fact most of the charity's sites are in cloughs where archaeology is unlikely to exist or have survived. One area of upland rough pasture, White Slack above Walsden, was field-walked and two possible burials and an area of clearance were identified. This was passed on to WYAAS and Treesponsibility. The weather has curtailed much fieldwork this year; formal planning and the monitoring of reservoir shores could not really take place, although further traces of Mesolithic activity were found on the moors above Todmorden on short walks. Members of Halifax Scientific Society were provided with an archaeological perspective on their walk on Black Hameldon and Bridestones.

The tracking down and recording of local, private flint collections has continued, with one significant assemblage being deposited with HBLHS for safekeeping. This might well be the best place to securely archive more local collections, given the difficulties of Calderdale Museum Service.

David Shepherd 3/10/12

Other News

Widdop

There is now evidence of a settlement at Widdop revealed by potsherd finds dating from the Medieval Period Circa 1200 to 1500 AD. Potsherd and other finds were taken to the Portable Antiquity Officer for identification and recording on the PAS database. Post Medieval artefacts were also identified.

Cistercian ware potsherds were among the finds dating to the four hundred years of the Medieval Period. The dating of the potsherds compliments the important research work that John Shackleton has carried out in the Widdop area which can be found at www.widdop.moonfruit.com

Norland Vaccary Walling

The 100 metre section of orthostatic walling is considered to be one of the finest examples of surviving Medieval Vaccary Walling in England. English Heritage has received both photographs and a digitized scale drawing of the walling. A full survey was carried out by Dave Shepherd and Brian Howcroft in August 2011. The local population of Norland have been aware of the orthostatic walling for many years. For some strange reason the antiquity of the wall has never been realized. There has never been a publication of the walling or any record lodged on the WYAAS database. English Heritage (York) is now preparing an urgent listing of the monument. The local Norland residents would like to see the walling repaired to prevent any further damage by erosion. Pennine Prospects are preparing to post photographs of the ancient walling on their web site.