

Established 1983

East Dorset Antiquarian Society

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NEWSLETTER –November 2015

DORSET ARCHAEOLOGICAL AWARDS 2015

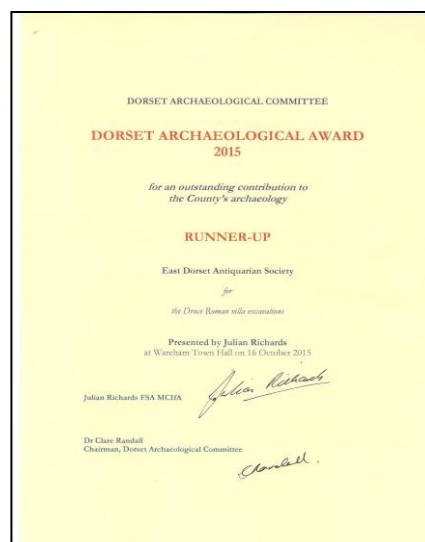
EDAS has been awarded the Runner-Up certificate for the Druce Farm Roman Villa excavation at this year's biennial Dorset Archaeological Award. This is the second time we have received the runner-up award, the EDAS excavation at Worth Matravers was awarded this honour in 2011.

The competition was extremely strong and it was encouraging to find so many good archaeological projects in contention for the main prize. My personal favourite was the Durotriges Project run by Bournemouth University which has uncovered evidence of a large Iron Age settlement which has a national significance. When this project was awarded an honorary mention I did, for a moment, allow myself the thought that we must have won. But I had forgotten about the runners up award and I have to admit a degree of disappointment when our name was called by Julian Richards. Nevertheless the huge amount of work we have undertaken at Druce Farm has been recognised.

The winners are a project that undertook research of the area where the fabulous Tarrant Valley Lunula was found by a metal detectorist. I await with great interest the publication of their results which must be of some significance.

Well done everybody who has been involved in the project.

Andrew Morgan



EAST DORSET ARCHAEOLOGY PLANNING GROUP – Pilot Project

Friday 30th October 2-4 pm Priest House Museum, Learning Centre

We recently made a presentation to the AGM of the Eastern Committee of the Dorset Association of Parish and Town Councils. The councillors were very interested and asked several incisive questions. I expect we will develop a working relationship with them over the next few months. We have already been contacted by two councillors about specific developments and they have been grateful for our advice about the local archaeology.

We have recently been joined by three new members. Anybody with an interest in this project and who would like to find out how we approach this challenging task is invited to attend one of our regular meetings.

This is still a pilot so there is always room for improvement.

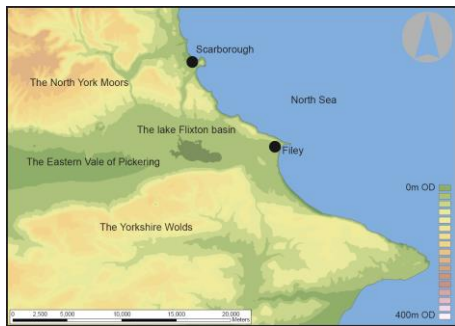
For further information please contact Andrew Morgan, email: andrewmorgz@aol.com

EDAS Lecture: 'Between the lake and forest: Early post-glacial settlers at Star Carr'

by Donald (Don) Henson

Don has held many positions, starting with serious study of worked flint but particularly concerned with archaeology in education and making it more accessible to the young. He is currently engaged in doctoral research on the public perception of the Mesolithic and how to better publicise Star Carr. This mainly came about because Nicky Milner, who has led the Star Carr project for 13 years, grew up in the area and yet had never heard of the site during her younger years – even though the site is widely considered as by far the most important and informative Mesolithic site in Britain, and in the top few across Europe.

20,000 years ago the north of Britain was covered by an ice sheet, but conditions improved gradually and the Ice Age 'ended' about 16,000 years ago – grasses grew, attracting animals like woolly mammoths, horses and reindeer, followed by people. They came from the Magdalenian culture, roughly in the area of modern northern France, as Britain was then joined to the Continent. With further warming trees grew, and both woolly mammoths and horses moved out about 14,000 years ago, the woodland attracting deer and aurochs, large wild cattle (the last known died in Poland in 1627). The 1,300 year colder period of the 'Younger Dryas' saw glaciers beginning in Scotland and the Lake District, with sub-Arctic conditions, although it isn't clear if all the people left.



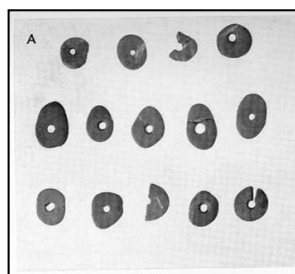
But then there was a sudden warming: within a lifetime there was a rise of about 10° in temperature and the climate changed to Northern Temperate (much as now) with trees growing again by 11,600 years ago. That was the beginning of the Mesolithic Period, which lasted until the start of the Neolithic about 6,000 years ago, generally seen as marking the transition from mobile hunter-gatherers to sedentary farmers. Star Carr, probably occupied from just under 11,000 to about 10,450 years ago, though with a gap in the middle, is clearly very early in the Mesolithic. It's in the Lake Flixton Basin; not far from the sea now, and it wasn't far then – at the north of the 'land bridge' to continental Europe which wasn't submerged until about 8,400 years ago.



Don told us that Star Carr was found by John Moore in 1948, along with about a dozen other Mesolithic sites around the long lost Lake Flixton. He excavated briefly that year, finding a lot of preserved wood and flint tools, followed for 4 years by Prof. Grahame Clark from Cambridge, who was then the leading expert on the Mesolithic. There was a great deal of well-preserved brushwood, thought then to be a platform along the edge of the lake but now just considered washed-up wood on the shoreline. There were large numbers of bones and around 17,000 flint tools, mostly small 'microlith' blades, and even an arrow shaft with embedded microliths – one of the very few ever found with blades in situ (the example below is actually from Denmark).

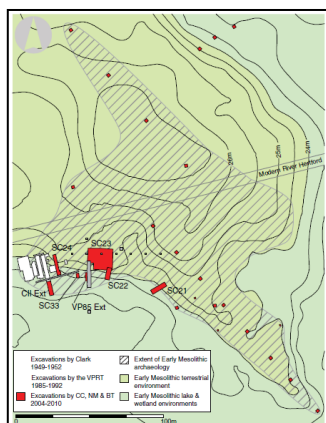
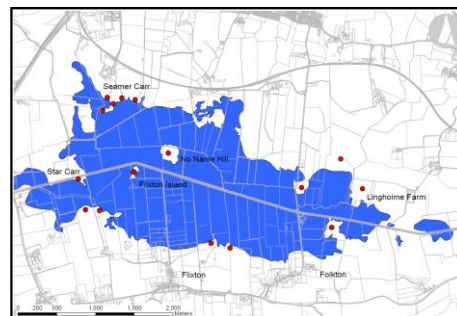


Almost 200 red deer antler 'harpoon points' were excavated, as well as rare shale beads and pendants, and what might be a paddle, though no boats (coracles seem the most likely and probably wouldn't survive). Perhaps most interesting were the tops of 21 red deer skulls, with shaped antlers and holes cut in them – probably for leather straps used in wearing them as head-dresses. Only 6 others are known from this period, and they're thought to have been worn by tribal shamans in rituals, probably relating to the importance of the deer in the lives of the people. Very similar headgear is known from many places down to modern times.



The major part of European Mesolithic settlement was actually in 'Doggerland', now under the North Sea where oil exploration has provided a good deal of evidence. Star Carr is towards the western edge, with the other very similar important Mesolithic sites in Denmark at the eastern edge.

Tim Schadla-Hall, who was instrumental in starting EDAS, excavated in the area in the 1980s. By this time, the extent of Lake Flixton and about 25 Mesolithic sites were known. Tim concentrated on nearby Seamer Carr, which was occupied a little earlier and later than Star Carr but not at the same time. Flixton Island showed evidence of hunting horses, so that it must have been even earlier in the post-glacial period before woodland was well established.

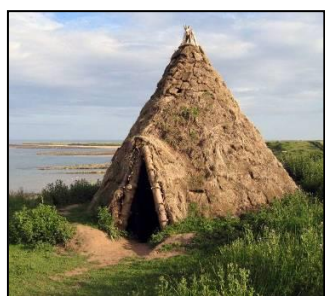


Tim had found that preservation of wood, etc., was much worse than 35 years earlier, so that the latest excavations from 2003 concentrated to the south-west, where it was thought there might be better survival of organic remains. Trial trenches across the area also showed that what Grahame Clark had thought was the whole of the site was probably only about 5%. Sadly, preservation was relatively poor, and it became clear that this was down to high acidity at greater depths, mostly because of drainage for farming (only a little was due to farming chemicals). Excavation can now be very difficult, with the chemical composition



causing coughs and only the larger organic pieces surviving; bone becomes like a thick jelly. We obviously need food, so this is the common conflict of past and present.

Just above the lowest levels, at around 10,800 years ago, preservation is somewhat better, and they discovered an actual wooden platform extending at least 30m along the shore – the first carpentry known in Europe. This may be a landing stage or perhaps a working platform (e.g. for soaking antlers so they can be worked). There were, of course, thousands of flints, and some have been meticulously re-fitted to show where different knapping activities took place. A wooden digging stick shows the importance of plants as food; in fact, most of the calories consumed by hunter-gatherers come from gathering rather than hunting.



The excavators were especially excited to find the oldest house in Britain (by about 2,000 years) – the post holes of a fairly small round-house, 3.5m in diameter and with angled walls. It was perhaps like that shown, though a rounded roof is equally possible. Even more interestingly, the house had been repaired at least once, showing that people used it over time. There is also evidence for what appears to be annual reed burning along the shore, with a gap showing Star Carr unused for over a century when Seamer Carr was occupied.

Along with the sheer extent of the site and the relatively permanent wooden platform, it does look as if fairly large numbers of people were much more settled in the landscape than we've thought, rather than in small, mobile bands. Sadly, over 70 Mesolithic skeletons were destroyed in WWII bombing and we only have one in Britain, so we can't do DNA tests to look for relationships among the people. These discoveries are, though, a large part of the new evidence on the Mesolithic that has been found over the last decade or so, showing a much more sophisticated and prosperous society than was believed. The Star Carr excavation has recently ended, and effort has turned to further analysis and consolidation of information for writing-up and publication; that may, in itself, lead to new insights about this period. If you want to know more about Star Carr and the Mesolithic, a valuable resource is their website: <http://www.starcarr.com>.

Don's fascinating and informative presentation was very well received, as shown by the almost 30 minutes of questions that followed. We particularly have to thank him for coming all the way from York just to spend the evening with EDAS.

Geoff Taylor

Druce Farm Roman Villa – THE BACKFILL



Having worked on the site since 2012, the time has come to close this phase of the work. There are a few outstanding questions but these are left for later generations to consider. We believe that we have completed the challenge posed to us last year by Sir Barry Cunliffe. The backfill has been undertaken according to instructions provided by the Association for Roman Archaeology. We thank all the team who turned out in force to complete the first phase, over 13th, 14th and 15th October. The backfill will be completed by the tenant farmer under our instruction over the winter. We are now focussing on the post excavation work and raising funds towards publication of the site in 2018-19.



Special Thanks to Tim and Rich



After visiting the Druce Roman Villa on two Open Days in the summer, Tim and Rich contacted us and volunteered to help with the backfill. We enthusiastically accepted their kind offer. They were able to work for the full three days and Rich even brought in a Dorset Apple cake he had baked. They fitted in immediately, worked tirelessly, were really helpful, making a great contribution and they instantly halved the average age of the team. On learning that they have a landscape gardening business I thought it only appropriate to share this with our EDAS members.

-----This is an advertisement-----



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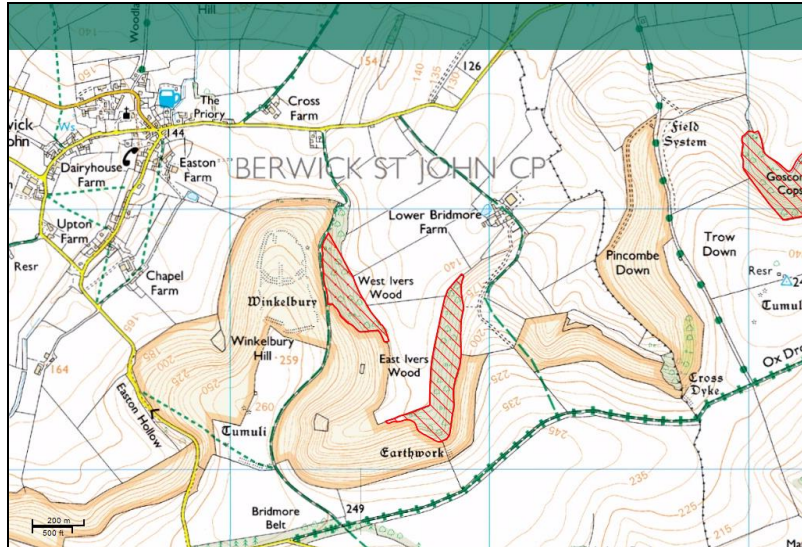
Tel: 07715 161702

email: twilson1980@hotmail.co.uk

Cranborne Chase AONB - Foundations of Archaeology Project

Winkelbury - Sunday 25 October 2015

A group of about 35 people, including nine EDAS members, met at Berwick St John village hall for the briefing before driving up to Winkelbury Hillfort. This is an evocative earthwork, just over the border in Wiltshire, that has been explored by General Pitt-Rivers. With his military background he concentrated on the military and defensive nature of the earthworks; our challenge being to reassess his evaluation.



The weather was spectacular and we spent a few hours exploring this intriguing univallate structure built on the edge of a chalkland spur overlooking the clay vale to the north, accompanied by the song of several irritated skylarks.

Over the next two years this project will look at several sites excavated by Pitt-Rivers. For further information please contact Philippe Paniel by email philippepanel@gmail.com

Note-1: the date of our February meeting has been brought forward by a week because of Lent which starts on Ash Wednesday 10th February.

Note-2: our April meeting will be held at Bournemouth University. The lecture about Pitt-Rivers has been chosen for our second joint lecture with the Students' Archaeology and Anthropology Society.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

2015-2016 Programme

Date	Speaker	Title
Wed 11th Nov 2015	Martyn Barber, English Heritage	"The Battle for Stonehenge: the aerodrome, the monument and the landscape"
Wed 9th Dec 2015	Prof Tony King, Winchester University	"Two villas in Somerset and one in Hampshire: excavations at Dinnington, Yarford and Meonstoke and their contribution to Romano-British archaeology"
Wed 13th Jan 2016	Stephen Fisher Maritime Archaeology Trust	"Forgotten Wrecks of the First World War"
Wed 3rd Feb 2016	Dr. John McNabb, Southampton University	"New Insights into Human Evolution"
Wed 9th Mar 2016	AGM	Members evening
Wed 13th Apr 2016	Jane Ellis-Schön Salisbury Museum	"Finding Pitt-Rivers" Note: this lecture will be held in a lecture theatre on Bournemouth University Talbot Campus.
Wed 11th May 2016	Dr Alex Langlands, Winchester University	"Mapping the Genius Loci: Exploring the Character of Space and Place in the Ordnance Survey"

Note: unless otherwise stated all lectures start at 7.30pm and are held at **St Catherine's Church Hall, Lewens Lane, Wimborne, BH21 1LE.**