East Dorset Antiquarian Society

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NEWSLETTER – December 2020

Wishing everyone as MERRY a CHRISTMAS as possible and a HAPPY Covid-free NEW YEAR

Editor's Notes

Many thanks to Wayne Bartlett for telling us about a year that's as important to English history as the dates we all remember, and to Andrew for the summary of November's Zoom presentation: **AD 871 – The Year of Nine Battles**.

This month's Zoom lecture is on Wednesday 9th December at 7:30 by our long-standing friend Mark Corney: 'Villas, churches and baptisteries' – a view of the impact of Christianity on the later Roman period. The Zoom link will be sent out a few days before; those not normally receiving it can email a request to Andrew Morgan: andrewmorgz@aol.com

The item on **The 'Jaguar Men' of Colombia** came initially from a story in the Sunday Times magazine, though the article here is a summary from many sources. It meshes well with the matters that Neil Meldrum covered in his article 'Humankind Finds Spirituality', in the November newsletter, concerning cave paintings and shamanism.

I am pleased to have the 5th of Neil's articles on mankind's spiritual evolution: **Into the Mesolithic and Beyond,** though it's a pity that space doesn't allow for the fuller discussion that he would prefer to have included after his research on the subject. This is, of course, a newsletter and not an academic journal, so you're often reading a summary of conclusions without all the arguments that led to them.

Alan Dedden's **Weblinks** and **Highlights** appear for the 34th time – a very long run for which I'm certainly grateful as, indeed, I am for Jo Crane & Sue Newman's aerial photograph in another **View from Above**. The series based on Roman epitaphs also continues with **Remembering the Romans IX**.

Articles in the newsletter don't necessarily reflect the views of EDAS; they may be the views of the author or summarise the information or conclusions of others. Sometimes they will be controversial. If you disagree with anything or have things to add then please do write in – all feedback is welcome.

Feedback and contributions to geoffnsue@hotmail.co.uk; don't Just 'REPLY'

I knew that this newsletter reaches the other end of Dorset, and is passed on into Somerset and Wiltshire, and am pleased to now find that at least 2 people see it on the Isle of Wight. If you're a non-member receiving this, I'd love to know where you are and how it comes to you. That's out of interest to see how widely we're read; I certainly don't want to try to stop it (but we'd be pleased if you joined!).

Geoff Taylor

P.S. We got our first Christmas card on 26th November – a record, for us at least!

AD 871 – The Year of Nine Battles: Zoom lecture by Wayne Bartlett

The November talk was by EDAS member and local historian Wayne Bartlett, and we were delighted that it was enjoyed by a large (virtual) audience. The intention was to explain why the year AD871 should be proudly remembered along with other notable examples such as 1066, 1485, 1588, 1649, 1941 and 1966, all noted for pivotal events that shaped the story of England and are etched in our collective memory. Wayne explained that the year 871 saw Alfred succeed his brother Æthelred I as King of Wessex, and that it was a turning point in the resistance against the growing threat from hordes of heathen Norsemen, better known as the Vikings.

The events that happened in 871 are described in three important written sources. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles (ASC) were commissioned by Alfred, although much information was retrieved from older works. Most years warranted only a line or two, but for 871 the events were of such importance that they occupied a whole page. It refers to nine battles, although not all were named and none were covered in much detail. The second reference is the Chronicle of Æthelweard, written in the tenth century; he was a descendant of Æthelred and an ealdorman of Dorset who also mentioned the nine battles. The third source is the biography of Alfred written by Asser, a learned Welsh monk recruited by Alfred from St David's. Asser was careful to project his master in a positive light – he emphasised the successes and minimised, or even ignored, any failures.

By the 7th century the Angles and Saxons had steadily consolidated their control of territories that eventually would become England. The Angles created several kingdoms: Northumberland, extending from the Humber to the Forth, was split into two entities: Bernicia, based on Bamburgh in the north, and Deira, based on Eoforwīc (York). The midlands were controlled by Mercia, stretching south to the Thames and including London, and finally there was the kingdom of East Anglia. The different Saxon tribes who ruled most of southern England had been unified under Cerdic, the first king of Wessex. All subsequent kings of Wessex claimed descent from Cerdic, even though his name implies that he was a Briton.

England & Wales in the Viking Age

Lindisfarne, near Bamburgh, began as an early Celtic Church site. In the late 7th century it had become the home, then resting place, of St Cuthbert, one the most iconic and revered saints in England. It became the most important Christian site in England and was held in esteem throughout Europe. Everything was to change with the arrival of the Vikings. The ASC entry for the year 793 dramatically describes their appearance at Lindisfarne "...there were immense flashes of lightning and fiery dragons were seen flying in the sky." The heathen Vikings were ruthless, killing or enslaving the local population, slaves being an important commodity for trade. Somehow the Cuthbert relics escaped to safety.

The Vikings had been visiting the British coast for many years and had established settlements on Scottish islands, such as Shetland and Orkney, and then in Ireland at Dublin. The first recorded raid in England was in 789 when three longboats landed on a beach near Portland, Dorset. They were met by Beaduheard, the shire reeve, who had anticipated meeting traders but was summarily executed. Initially they were content to raid and terrorise coastal settlements around Ireland, Wales and England, and even Francia, where their longboats allowed them to penetrate along the great rivers to plunder far inland. As time progressed their ambitions grew and they decided to settle this rich land.

Through the 9th century the Vikings exerted growing control over much of northern England, Mercia and East Anglia. There were Viking raids on Wessex during this period, but they were not yet regarded as an immediate threat, and King Æthelwulf had gained a significant success over the Vikings at the Battle of

Aclea in AD851. This was also the first year that the Vikings spent the winter in England. The threat to Wessex was growing, but in 855 King Æthelwulf took his youngest son, Alfred, to Rome, where the Pope is supposed to have blessed him as a future king. In fact all four of Æthelwulf's sons were to be crowned king. On their return journey Æthelwulf, a widower, was to marry Judith, a child bride and daughter of King Charles the Bald of Francia, probably to cement an alliance against their common enemy. She was to return home in 860, twice widowed, the second husband being her stepson Æthelbald.

The Viking threat increased significantly with the arrival of the 'Great Heathen Army', the largest Viking force yet assembled. It was a loose body of farmers and tradesmen who were drawn from across Scandinavia, their primary allegiance being to chieftains from their local communities. It is believed they were led by four warlords: Halfdan Ragnarsson, Ivar the Boneless, Bjorn Ironside and possibly Ubba. They were a ruthless fighting force who terrorised their enemies but they were also politically astute, with an excellent intelligence network, and were quick to exploit weaknesses and rival factions within their enemies. In 865 they landed in East Anglia, where King Edmund was forced to provide them with the large number of horses needed for their campaign. Wayne explained that the Vikings were excellent horsemen as well as seafarers. For the next 4 years they rampaged over the north of England. They turned York, now named Jórvík, into a major Hiberno-Norse trading settlement. Then they marched into Mercia, which agreed terms with the Viking horde. By 870 the Vikings effectively controlled Northumbria and East Anglia, and had subjugated Mercia.

In the winter of 870-871, the Vikings turned their attention to Wessex, the richest kingdom in the land. The first of the Nine Battles is probably their winter attack on Reading, which was taken by surprise and fell easily. Reading was important because it offered the perfect defensive site, being located on a peninsular where the Vikings constructed a typical D-shaped fortification using the River Thames, the River Kennet and the man-made Plummery Ditch.

There followed a series of battles or skirmishes in quick succession. The second battle occurred only three days later when the Vikings sent out a large raiding party under two earls. It was met at Englefield by an army of local men under the command of Æthelwulf, an ealdorman. A number of the Vikings were killed, including one of the earls. The others fled back to Reading, where their defences continued to be enhanced.

Four days later Æthelred I, King of Wessex ,and his brother Alfred arrived with a large army. They attempted to retake Reading but, after an initial success, they were repulsed with heavy losses on both sides, including the local hero Æthelwulf. The Viking counter-attack is described in dramatic style in the ASC, "Like wolves they burst out of all the gates and joined battle with all their might".

The Wessex army retreated to regroup and receive reinforcements. The Vikings then saw an opportunity to destroy their opponents and set out in pursuit. The Battle of Ashdown happened a few days later, possibly at Kingstanding Hill. The Vikings arrived first and deployed along the top of the ridge, giving them the advantage. Æthelred retired to take Mass, while Alfred led his men onto the battlefield. Both sides formed their forces into shield walls. Alfred recognised that he risked being overwhelmed by the Viking army as it finalised preparations, so he launched a surprise attack and led his men in a charge up the hill. The battle is said to have raged around a small thorn tree and finally, by force of will, the West Saxons were victorious. The Vikings suffered heavy losses, including King Bagsecg and five earls, and were chased back to Reading, causing many more casualties. The Battle of Ashdown is the most significant win by Wessex at this time, and is recorded both in the ASC and by Asser. But Wayne explained that battles were rarely fought to the last man; the leaders carefully assessed the ebb and flow of battle, and would attempt a controlled withdrawal when defeat seemed likely.

In these times leaders and even kings led from the front; they were actively involved with their troops, albeit protected by a hand-picked band of bodyguards. This is demonstrated in the heroic Anglo-Saxon poem written a century later regarding The Battle of Maldon: "Then Byrhtnoth martialled his men. He rode about, issuing instructions as to how they should stand firm, not yielding an inch, and how they should tightly grip their round shields, forgetting their qualms and pangs of fear. And when he had arrayed the warriors' ranks, he dismounted with his escort at a carefully chosen place where his finest hearth-band stood prepared for the fight."

Despite their latest defeat, the Vikings were soon on the march again, and two weeks later there followed another engagement called the Battle of Basing, probably located near the royal manor of Basing in Hampshire. Details are limited, but it is possible that it resulted in a marginal victory for the West Saxons.

The sixth conflict is the Battle of Meretun, which took place two months later when Æthelred and Alfred fought against the Viking army led by Halfdan Ragnarsson. The Vikings were initially put to flight, but at the end of the day and after "much slaughter" the Saxons retreated. One of the casualties was Heahmund, the Bishop of Sherborne, and his death is dated in the English calendar of saints as 22 March 871. In those days Bishops were also warriors. The ASC records that, "Although the ranks were not at full strength, high courage was in their breasts, and rejoicing in battle they repel the enemy some distance. However, overcome with weariness, they desist from fighting, and the barbarians won a degree of victory which one might call fruitless. Afterwards they dispersed, to carry off plunder and ravage places."

Battlefields are notoriously difficult to locate and the location of Meretun is not known, but Wayne suggests that Martin Down is a likely site. It is near the meeting point of three shires, Dorset, Hampshire and Wiltshire, and would have acted as a gathering place for their fyrds. It is also near Bokerley Dyke, which offers a strong defensive position.

Æthelred I died soon after, likely from recent battle wounds. He was buried in Wimborne Minster, where he is remembered by a 15th century brass commemoration. Alfred, only 22 years of age but a proven warrior, was chosen to succeed him as King of Wessex, rather than Æthelred's young son Æthelwold, who was still a child.

The last major battle recorded is the Battle of Wilton when Alfred had been king for just one month. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle tells us that Alfred had been fighting with a small troop against the entire raiding Viking army, so it is perhaps no surprise that Alfred lost. But the Vikings did not progress further, instead returning to Reading. There are two more battles to make up the Nine Battles, but they are not listed and are likely to have been skirmishes and probably losses for the West Saxons.

The Saxons had suffered a succession of defeats and their army was severely depleted and exhausted. The question, then, is why didn't the Vikings take advantage of the situation and proceed to conquer Wessex? The answer will never be known, but undoubtedly it was for several reasons. First and foremost, Wessex had proven to be well-led and a difficult adversary that had recovered rapidly after each setback. The Vikings had also suffered many losses and other kingdoms offered easier takings. Finally, it is quite possible that the ever pragmatic Alfred had bought them off with Danegeld. The ASC suggests the latter was indeed a factor, and explains "In the same year, the Saxons made peace with the Vikings on condition that they would leave them, and this the Vikings did".

Wayne suggested that the battles of AD871 should be considered as a Dunkirk-like event. Wessex had nearly collapsed, but through great resolve and the qualities of a new leader it regrouped and survived to fight another day. Alfred was now king and he had proven to be a difficult and resourceful opponent. He was a most complex man but a very effective leader; definitely the right man for the circumstances. Wessex had demonstrated that the Vikings could be beaten in battle. As we know, the threat had not disappeared and a few years later the Vikings were to return and nearly destroy Wessex. They would have succeeded but for the resolve and drive of Alfred to snatch victory from the verge of total defeat, which was only possible because of the events of AD871. Imagine if Alfred had failed; I expect we'd all be wearing handmade woolly jumpers and enjoying the pleasures of *hygge*.

Andrew Morgan

P.S. I would like to recommend Wayne's book: W.B. Bartlett. 2019. *Vikings - A History of the Northmen*. Amberley Publishing, Stroud.

"I hope they're care workers or fruit pickers. We need those."

The ‘Jaguar Men’ of Colombia

Chiribiquete National Park is the largest protected area in Colombia, huge by any standards at 4.3m hectares or around 16,600 square miles. It’s also the largest tropical rain forest national park in the world, first established in 1989 but expanded twice since. Situated in southern central Colombia, it’s also at the western edge of the Guiana Shield, an ancient and stable part of the earth’s crust and upper mantle, in this case around 1.7bn years old. I imagine that’s why the Shield is one of the most biodiverse areas in the world.

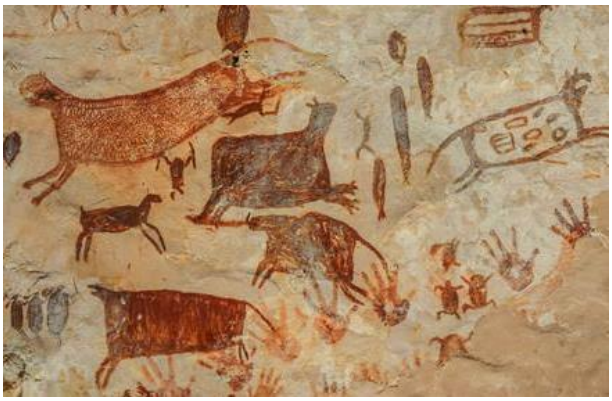
The park includes lowland areas of tropical forest, savannas and rivers, but also the Serranía de Chiribiquete mountains, called *Mejeimi Meje* (the Echoes of Silence) – by the indigenous Upichia people. The mountains are actually *tepuis*, table-top rock formations rising out of the dense forest below, eroded by wind and rain into sheer cliffs with labyrinthine caves running through the mesas. Similar formations in the Guiana Shield further east have amongst the highest waterfalls in the world, including the longest uninterrupted drop of over 800m at Angel Falls in Venezuela.

The park was declared a Unesco World Heritage site in 2018, partly for its biodiversity and its contribution to the biodiversity of the Guiana Shield as a whole. Almost 3,000 species of animals and plants had been recorded in Chiribiquete National Park by 2018, though the actual number is no doubt much higher as scientific research has been quite limited. This is partly due to the park’s remoteness and difficulty of access, but also to the wish to safeguard the isolated indigenous communities living there. At least four nomadic groups are in voluntary isolation within Chiribiquete, for whom contact with the outside world could easily be deadly. There is, of course, also a need to protect the wildlife, which includes many iconic and threatened species such as giant anteaters, woolly monkeys, giant otters, a unique emerald hummingbird and, of course, jaguars.

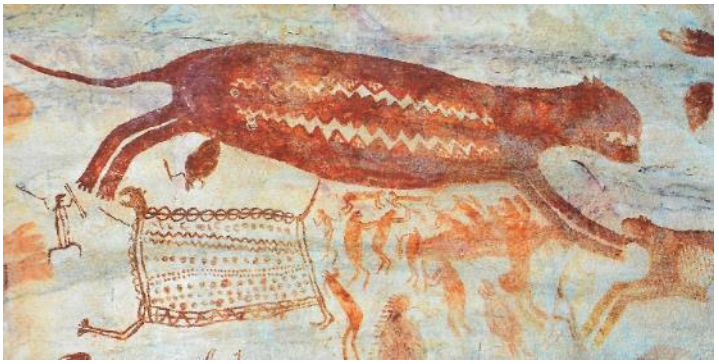
But Chiribiquete is also of major cultural significance because of the huge number of pictographs found in the Serrania mountains: at least 75,000 rock paintings are known, well preserved in rock shelters and under overhangs. That is counting the individual artworks, which are mostly gathered together in large murals, of which 60-70 are known (depending on source). Given the relative lack of exploration (only about 20% of the mountains are thought to have been properly explored), and the dangerous positions of some of the paintings found so far, no doubt much more rock art remains to be discovered. Their remoteness and difficulty of access means that few of the paintings have been scientifically dated so far, but it is felt that some may be 20,000 years old. It is not very long since this date was earlier than humans were first thought to have reached the Americas, and some say that close dating the paintings will be impossible because they were painted with mineral-based, iron oxide pigments.

The portrayals are interpreted as scenes of hunter-gatherers on hunts, in battles, dancing and conducting ceremonies. They include animals such as crocodiles, deer and capybara which are, of

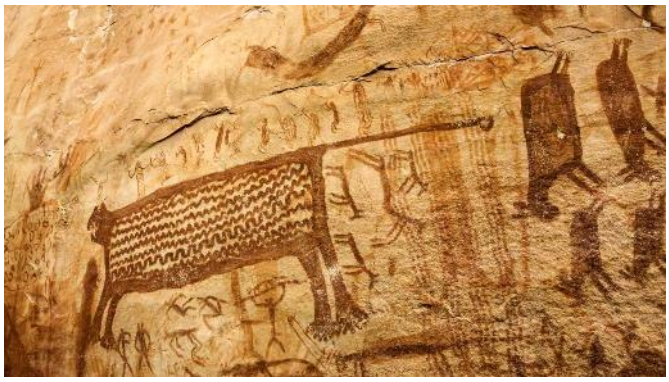
course, still extant in the region, but apparently also long-extinct creatures such as megatheres, 6m long sloths that weighed up to 4 tonnes and died out around 10,000 years ago. Frustratingly, I've neither been able to find a picture nor to find out to what other extinct animals the "such as" refers. Human depictions of megafauna are, in any case, very rare.



The most common animal pictured is the jaguar, the jungle's most fearsome predator. Indigenous peoples from the southern United States down to the tip of South America regard the jaguar as a totem of power, in essence 'the king of the jungle'. He is the overlord of the animals, whose job is to keep the ecosystem in balance. Some think that much of the art was by the Karijona tribe, still living in the area though probably under 100 people now vs. the estimated 15,000 when the Spanish arrived, but other indigenous groups also regard the mountains as sacred and won't enter the area out of respect.



The 'Jaguar Men' refers to the tribal shamans who make a spiritual journey into the 'cosmic realm' to interact with the jaguars, often helped by hallucinogenic plants. The jaguar is at the centre of many tribal belief systems, needing to be persuaded to release animals into human hands so that hunts can be successful. The current Upichia shaman describes the painting as "spirits, alive in the rocks ... which still govern the balance of the natural world". It is thought that some shamans may still enter the mountains and 'update' some of the rock faces.



If you look further into this subject you'll find articles suggesting that nothing was known about the rock art until a film by British wildlife film-maker Mike Slee, taken from a helicopter, was released about 5 years ago. This isn't true, nor claimed by Mike Slee, as some studies on the paintings were done over a century ago. Serious exploration has continued intermittently since then, particularly from the early 1990s under Carlos Castaño-Uribe, a Colombian archaeologist and anthropologist. Although research has been severely hampered by fears of revolutionary guerrillas from FARC (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*), this also served to deter other visitors.

However, FARC signed a peace deal with the Colombian government in 2016, since when illegal logging and clearances for growing coca and palm oil, and for raising cattle, have increased dramatically. Castaño-Uribe and his team had revealed few of their findings to help protect both the art and the ecosystem, but published a book in 2019 in the hope that it might spur greater protection for the area. The title, C*hiribiquete: La maloka cosmica de los hombres Jaguar*, translates as 'Chiribiquete: Cosmic home of the Jaguar Men' but the book itself hasn't been translated (yet?).

Geoff Taylor

PS: After the newsletter was just ready, Alan sent me information about a Channel 4 series starting Saturday 5th on lost tribes of the Amazon, which includes Chiribiquete. Serendipity! See also for **here** for an article in the Independent.

Into the Mesolithic and Beyond

The long Upper Palaeolithic era was coming to an end and so was the last Ice Age. Around 13,000 years ago saw the dawning of the Mesolithic era (dates vary across the world, with NW Europe's Mesolithic as late as 10,000 years ago). This is a period when Humankind took its first tentative steps towards a settled existence, starting a change in its whole lifestyle which would revolutionise Humankind itself. As things move from the Mesolithic to the rather better known Neolithic era, at its earliest over 10,000 years ago, we see this change initiating the first stirrings towards Humankind adopting agriculture as a way of life.

With the start of the Mesolithic bands of hunter gatherers were getting larger, with a more structured leadership and perhaps starting to acquire tribal loyalties. In the increasingly benign climate at the end of the Ice Age these bands were beginning to join together at more regular, and for longer, intervals to hunt, feast, find partners and acknowledge, in some organised manner, the supernatural. In certain parts of the world, notably the Middle East, these larger bands, while still generally migratory, may well have started to identify certain tracts of land over which they hunted as having some special affinity for that particular group, an affinity that may also have entailed supernatural connotations. Over the millennia concepts of ownership would no doubt have developed, concepts which would have enormous consequences in human history.

What might the supernatural have been at this stage? The Upper Palaeolithic was the age of animism, a belief that animals, plants and physical features (e.g. mountains, rivers and lakes) all had spirits which could communicate with our ancestors' spirits on an equal footing (a feature seen in more modern isolated tribal communities). As our forefathers moved into the Mesolithic, they may increasingly have come to the view that the spirits of their ancestors had the ability not only to intervene but also to influence a complex spirit world. A realisation was developing that Humankind was something more than their animal compatriots and natural surroundings, that the spirits of our forefathers' deceased brethren had a greater clout than the spirits of animals.

'Shigir', a wooden statue (perhaps the oldest yet discovered) found in Siberia dating to *c*.11000 BCE. Does he represent the spirit of ancestors?

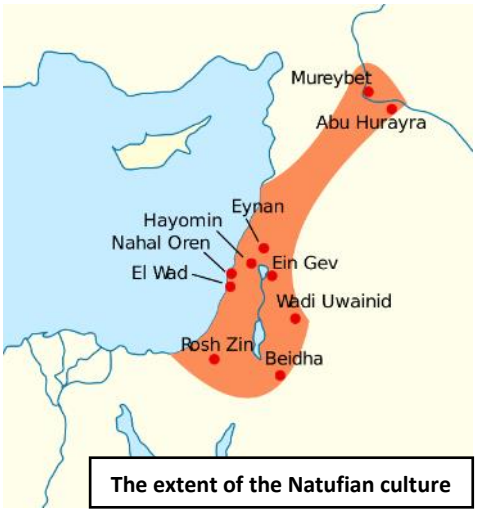
As the spirits of the ancestors started to increase in significance, so did the veneration of those ancestors. As our forefathers gained a greater understanding of their own existence, semi-mythical ancestors emerged whose influence and authority grew as their stories were enhanced by admiring successors. Perhaps this led to an increasing recognition by our forefathers of some form of spiritual existence beyond human mortality, an afterlife?! This may all have become bound up with the mythology of origins; the origin of the world, of game, of humankind and of course of death. Did the perception grow in the minds of our forefathers that the deceased ancestors may be able to explain these things?

Upper Palaeolithic folk would have been well aware of the life cycles of fruits, berries and cereals from time immemorial. There is clear evidence of Palaeolithic hunter gatherers utilising edible plants. But possibly, in these earlier times, the need or desire to stay in one place and cultivate plants was simply not there. Migration and movement had been a human trait for many thousands of years; it was the natural way of things so why abandon it? And, anyway, maybe it was just too damn cold! But around 10000 BCE the climate, in the Middle East among other parts of the world, was becoming very appreciably warmer and wetter. Conditions were becoming decidedly more pleasant.

The move to more settled living, which initially was restricted to present day southern Turkey and Syria, (although subsequent excavations may well show that it was rather more widespread) would have been

more a consequence of these changes in climate and the resultant improvement in the environment, rather than any desire to grow crops. Our Mesolithic forefathers would still have relied mainly on hunting. But as they settled in villages, hunting became less paramount and gathering the fruits of the Earth and manipulating the Earth to produce food started to gain traction.

A good example of this is the Natufian culture in the Middle East. They were proto-agriculturists and rearers of livestock circa 10000 BCE. This society was clearly at the forefront of the transition to agriculture. The Natufians were one of the first groups to adopt a sedentary (or semi-sedentary) lifestyle, encouraged, no doubt, by the changing climate and an increasingly favourable environment. They were sedentary before organised agriculture but it became inevitable that the level of food production would need to increase. Firstly because of the increasing paucity of game within the vicinity of the settlement, and secondly because the constraints on population growth imposed by a mobile lifestyle were relaxed. Hunter gatherers controlled their populations; they were well aware that they could not support surplus offspring. Infanticide was not uncommon and a mother would normally spend three or four years suckling her children. Birth rates were much lower and kept lower. As Humankind settled both birth rates and child mortality grew exponentially, seen today in differences between settled subsistence communities and nomadic peoples.



The extent of the Natufian culture

Natufian burial rights are intriguing. They, and other contemporary societies, practiced extensive skull burial separately from the rest of the body. The view has been expressed that as the brain may have been considered by these people as the home of the soul, or spirit, the skull was separated from the body so that the community could consume the brain of the deceased as a kind of communion with the spirits of the ancestors. Possibly this was the origin of later religious practices common throughout the world, of some form of communion with the gods? Conversely, the practice may not have had such a supernatural significance at all but simply have been considered as a means of gaining the power of a particularly exalted individual. Who knows?


Thought to be the remains of a Natufian site (modern roofs).

On to Göbekli Tepe in south east Turkey the first known site (so far discovered) with monumental architecture erected by Humankind, begun about 10000 BCE. This is a huge site comprising some 22 acres and 20 enclosures (probably more, the site is still being excavated). There is little evidence here of permanent human habitation. There is, however, ample evidence of feasting, burial of the dead and possibly sacrifice of both humans and animals. Huge, megalithic stone pillars up to 18 feet high were constructed; how these people transported and erected these enormous blocks remains a mystery.

Göbekli Tepe was clearly a religious site, perhaps the world's oldest surviving temple. The prevailing view is that at this stage Humankind was starting on the road of humanising what appeared to be supernatural phenomena, i.e. things which were encountered but which could not be explained in rational terms by our Mesolithic ancestors. Some of the megaliths at Göbekli Tepe appear to have carved arms and hands, among many other different emblems, maybe the first evidence of anthropomorphic gods emerging from the ancestors?

Although Göbekli Tepe was erected by people still in a hunter gatherer economy, the erection of so much megalithic architecture at this site and others must have required a considerable element of organised labour over a long period. It must also have needed a large and disciplined work force which was probably mostly voluntary, at least in the earlier stages. This workforce may well have believed that they were working for the good of their brethren and to appease some higher force.

Although there is no evidence of human occupation at Göbekli Tepe itself, there are signs of settled village life nearby. There has recently been some tantalising evidence of the domestication of wheat some 30km from the site; agriculture was clearly coming! Construction of other nearby sites, Nevali Çori, Hallan Çemi and Çayönü started about 9-8500 BCE, a little later than Göbekli Tepe. At these sites, unlike Göbekli Tepe, there is evidence of residential occupation.

Göbekli Tepe and these other sites marked a transformation in humanity. For the first time Humankind puts itself at the centre of the spiritual plane, rather than on the periphery. Perhaps for the first time it perceives itself as being exalted over other earthly living things, rather than being equal to them. Humankind begins the process of transforming the ancestral and animal spirits, and the spirits of nature, into Big Gods with big personalities.

Neil Meldrum

Latin in Dorset Place Names

- Ryme Intrinseca – from rim (it's on the edge of a ridge) and the Latin for 'within the bounds' (the parish is on the edge of the county). John Betjeman's poem misspells it as "Rime".
- Toller Porcorum – from the name of the river (now called Hooke) and Latin for 'of the pigs' (herds of which were bred there; it was 'Swyne Tolre' in the Middle Ages). Nearby Toller Fratrum was from the brothers (i.e. Knights Hospitaller) and Toller Whelme from the Anglo-Saxon for 'spring' or 'source' as it's by the source of the River Hooke.

- Whitchurch Canonicorum – named after the rather obscure Saint Wite (Latinised as Candida) from Saxon times; Saint Wite's cross is the Dorset flag. The Latin translates as 'of the canons', i.e. of Salisbury Cathedral who once owned the manor there. The picture is of the Church of St Candida & Holy Cross.

- Blandford Forum – the first part is about the ford where, from the Old English, gudgeon or blay (i.e. fish) can be found. Forum, of course, refers to the market there. In 1288 the town was recorded as Cheping Blaneford, where *cēping* is Old English for market.
- Minterne Magna and Parva – distinguishing the larger and smaller places at/near a house where mint grows, *ærn* being Old English for house. Of course we also have Magna for Canford, Fontmell and Kington, as well as Parva for Hinton. All of the 'Magnas' had a 'Parva' at one time, whilst Hinton Magna is now Hinton Martell.
- Bere Regis – probably from Old English *bær* meaning 'woodland pasture' or 'wood/grove', with Regis being 'of the king', in this case relating to houses in the area owned by King John.
- Lyme Regis – from the River Lym, *lym* apparently meaning torrent of water (in Jamaica *lyme* would be to hang out with friends). Regis here relates to the charter granted by Edward I in 1284 and confirmed by Elizabeth I in 1591.

Did I miss any?

But we are still missing Volume 137 of the Dorset Proceedings, which somebody has. If it's you, please let me know – no recriminations; we'd just like it back please: geoffnsue@hotmail.co.uk

And if you have any information on EDAS events in the 1990s, that would also be helpful to fill in gaps in our summary of EDAS's history. Anything would be useful, but particularly:

- **EDAS Newsletters for 1991-2000**
- **EDAS Programmes for 1991-1996**

Web Link Highlight November 2020

Of course it was bound to happen. Say that local papers rarely have items of historical or archaeological interest and loads appear. Two more from the local Echo this month [you will, of course, already have read about the Iron Age TB skeleton in the November newsletter – ed.], plus another from the New Forest National Park website. Let's hope this is more than just a brief aberration.

The item on the legal challenge to the Stonehenge A303 tunnel, I have to admit I included as much for the stunning photograph used to illustrate the article as its content. The low light shows the features around the stones to brilliant effect, and it was taken at the right time to get the shadows aligning with midwinter sunset, although it was certainly not taken at that time judging by the few visitors all on the footpath.

Alan Dedden

November Weblinks

[A different approach this month with the hyperlinks edited to take up less space, though they should still work the same. Let me know if you have any problems – ed.]

- **Mount Pleasant - A Last Hurrah?** here
- **Detectorist Finds Anglo-Saxon Penny In Essex** here
- **East Dorset Museum Iron Age TB Skeleton Was Migrant From Europe** (Bournemouth Echo) here

- **New Dinosaur Species Found In Drawer In Brighton Museum** here
- **2 Million Year Old Skull Of Human Ancestor Found In South Africa** here
- **Plans For Homes Close To Lake Gates Roman Fort Withdrawn** (Bournemouth Echo) here
- **Fortress From The Time Of King David Excavated In Israel** here
- **Coffins Buried 2500 Years Ago Found In Egypt** here
- **Roman Villa Found Near Wrexham Is First In NE Wales** here
- **Hermes Found In Greek Sewer** here
- **New Forest Community Dig Reveals Bronze Age Ring Ditch** here
- **Remains Of Master And Slave Found At Pompeii** here
- **Prehistoric Shark Hid Sharpest Teeth In Nightmare Jaws** here
- **Reassessment Of Ulster Museum Dinosaur Bones Finds They Are Two Different Species** here
- **Stonehenge Legal Challenge Launched** here

We'd really like you to send your weblinks to Alan at alan.dedden@gmail.com

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View from Above No 32: Pimperne Long Barrow

Photo by Sue Newman and Jo Crane

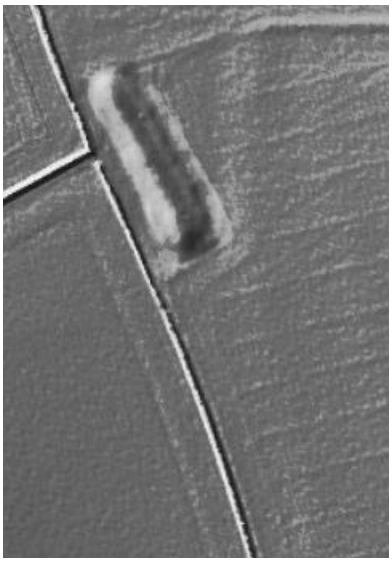
This Neolithic long barrow is about 5km to the north east of Blandford, in a prominent position at the top of a hill, 300m to the north of the A354 between Pimperne and Tarrant Hinton. It's typical of the type of earthen long barrow still remaining on Cranborne Chase, of which this is the furthest west.

The barrow is orientated north west to south east (as is Wor Barrow: see November 2020 Newsletter). The barrow mound is parallel sided, some 98m long and 18m wide, although the last couple of metres at the north end are much reduced from ploughing. This is a very long long barrow, as against what are said

to be the longest – West Kennet (newsletter January 2020) and East Kennet at around, or a little over, 100m ('official' reports do vary!). It is still up to 3m high, with side ditches up to 10m wide and 1m deep, though the ditches are now hard to see as a result of ploughing and silting.

Where investigated, long barrows appear to have been used for communal burial, often with only parts of the human remains having been selected for interment. It has been suggested that the bones buried were those left after exposure of the body in the open air, since they were the ones that the gods had chosen to leave. Pimperne long barrow appears never to have been properly excavated, so that the burials, in what was presumably a timber mortuary chamber, may remain. Without any dating evidence, its construction can only be suggested as *c*.4,000-3,500 BC.

An Iron Age enclosure can be seen in the aerial photograph, probably a settlement, on the north-western side of the barrow, one of 4 recorded by the Royal Commission in Pimperne parish. The long barrow is actually just in Tarrant Hinton parish, where the Commission recorded 2 other long barrows as well as 4 more Iron Age enclosures and/or settlements. Both parishes have a large number of barrows, though mostly ploughed out.



In Heywood Sumner's 1913 *Cranborne Chase*, the plan of the Pimperne long barrow shows what he describes as a boundary ditch, heading north from the southern end of the barrow and leading to "the earthworks on South Tarrant Hinton Down" about 300m away. This seems to have been ploughed out and certainly isn't visible on the aerial photograph.

On the LIDAR image (© Environment Agency), the ditch roughly follows the right side of the lighter line to the right of the barrow, though the lighter area appears to be the remains of a trackway to Tarrant Gunville, also shown on Sumner's plan, which then headed south from the barrow. The line of the ditch was westwards from the south of the barrow, clearly now invisible on both images.

Geoff Taylor/Jo Crane

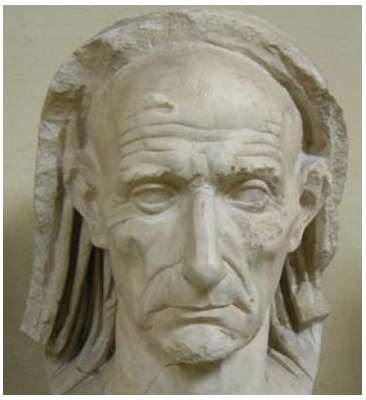
REMEMBERING THE ROMANS IX

PLUS MINUS, or "approximately", is seen on some epitaphs, sometimes in full, as P.M like the epitaph in the previous article, or PL.M (with or without the full stop), which was on a Christian tombstone in article III. This is, of course, a clear indication that people's exact ages weren't known. There is, for example, one for a boy of 'about 2' from his parents and another putting years of marriage as 'around 18'. It is much more common on Christian epitaphs, perhaps because they were more honest, but also suggested as because the afterlife was more important than counting the years on earth. Some of these approximations still show months and days of age.

This is just one more reason why I believe that many, perhaps almost all, Romans didn't know their exact age. It is even more likely that most of those setting up epitaphs wouldn't know the exact age of the person commemorated, particularly if the latter was fairly old and had outlived most contemporaries.

Although Augustus apparently introduced birth registers, they appear to have been ineffective; even his adopted son, who became the Emperor Tiberius, was variously stated to have been born in 3 different years. There was apparently also no single central counting system for Roman years. Years were ostensibly counted from the mythical founding of Rome in 753 BC until Augustus reset that to year 1 in 6 BC, though everything that I've seen dated refers to that year's consular authority, e.g. the 3rd year of Emperor x's consular powers. This clearly requires knowledge that might be beyond the average person, especially as the majority were probably illiterate. Doing sums in Roman numerals isn't particularly easy either, and it may well be that people knew the month of their birth better than the year.

It might be thought that the higher classes lived longer than the general population yet, on the whole, it seems not to be the case - their better nutrition was offset by the higher disease levels of the urban environment where most lived for much of the time, a situation seen for élites up to the 18th century. There is, though, better evidence for how long the highest classes lived, with some cases of quite long lives. For example, the Emperor Vespasian died a few months short of his 70th birthday and Emperor Augustus reached 77.



A bust in the Vatican Museum thought to be Marcus Aemilius Scaurus. He died aged 74 in 89 BC, though the date of the bust is uncertain. Scaurus was Consul in 115 BC and a very important senior Senator. Although almost unknown today, he was one of the most influential politicians in the later Republic.

Romans clearly could live to advanced ages, though the numbers who did would be much lower than today; I mentioned in article II that the number reaching 70 was probably only a tenth of today's figure. The epitaph of Experantius mentioned in article VII commemorates him as almost having reached 100 with a precision that is clearly highly unlikely: 99 years, 11 months and 28 days. Who, indeed, would be likely to know these details? I think that the best that can be said is that Experantius thought himself, and was thought by others, to be very old in Roman terms. The epitaph is, then, emphasising that in a way that is quite striking for the reader.

It is possible, if unlikely, that Experantius was in his late 90s, but I'll look at why I really think such advanced ages are generally exaggerated in the next article.

Geoff Taylor

The Agglestone

Many of you will know this rock on the heath about a mile west of Studland. Some, like me, will have been surprised to find it when walking that way – a huge sandstone boulder, about 6m high and of about 400 tons, perched on top of a roughly conical mound. It looks as if the mound is artificial and the rock has been placed there, perhaps as a place of pagan worship. Its name, said to derive from Saxon *helig* meaning holy, might add to that view, but it has also been called the 'Devil's Anvil' or 'Devil's Nightcap'.

In fact, the legend (or one legend) is that it was thrown by The Devil from the Needles on the Isle of Wight, aimed at Corfe Castle or Bindon Abbey near Wool, or even Salisbury Cathedral. The Devil's aim was obviously not thought to be very good since, as with many such stories, he missed by quite a lot. At least the direction to Corfe Castle isn't far out; Salisbury would be not too far off 90° out. More prosaically, the boulder is an iron-rich Tertiary sandstone and probably entirely natural, as with the mound.

The name may actually come from *aggle*, which is apparently Dorset dialect for 'wobble'. Although any wobble isn't apparent now, the stone has eroded and fallen to the south east from its original position shown in the black & white photograph. That was published in 1906 but is thought to have been taken around the turn of the century, with the anvil shape much clearer. Whilst much of the erosion is natural, the attraction of the boulder for climbers can't have helped.

EDAS 2020-2021 PROGRAMME

Subject to coronavirus restrictions lectures will one day be from 7:30 – 9:30 pm at St Catherine's Church Hall, Lewens Lane, Wimborne, BH21 1LE. Meanwhile, at 7:30 on a device near you.

http://www.dorset-archaeology.org.uk/programme.html

2020			
Wed 9th December	Zoom Lecture	**Mark Corney**	Villas, Churches and Baptisteries
2021			
Wed 13th January	Zoom Lecture	**Sophy Charlton**	Finding Mesolithic Britain: Biomolecular Approaches to Hunter-Gatherer Archaeology
Wed 10th February	Zoom Lecture	**Paul Cheetham**	300 Miles in the Footsteps of Vespasian – Lake Farm Roman legionary fortress
Wed 10th March	Zoom Meeting	**AGM and members' talk**	Keeper's Lodge – Andrew Morgan and Lilian Ladle
Wed 14th April	Zoom Lecture	**Mike Allen**	The Prehistoric Chalkland Landscape of Stonehenge, Avebury and Dorchester - tearing up the textbooks and starting again
Wed 12th May	Zoom Lecture	**Julian Richards**	Shaftesbury - Alfred's Town, Alfred's Abbey
EVENTS TO BE RESCHEDULED			
tbd	Tour	**Devizes Museum**	Led by museum director David Dawson
tbd	Walk	**Cranborne Chase**	9 mile walk from Martin Green's farm looking at the history of the Chase, led by Alan Dedden
tbd	Day trip	**London - Sir John Soane's Museum and the Museum of London (tbc)**	Coach trip to visit two of London's Museums

DISTRICT DIARY

Your information is very welcome, especially now when this section is completely empty – do let me know of any events.

ALL EVENTS ARE SUBJECT TO CORONAVIRUS RESTRICTIONS THEN IN FORCE

(Local societies may have events, but they're not generally advertised beyond members)