# East Dorset Antiquarian Society

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# NEWSLETTER – February 2021

## Editor's Notes

We were pleased to welcome Dr Sophy Charlton for our 5th Zoom lecture, and to welcome members of the Blandford Museum Archaeology Group joining our viewers for the first time, as well as one viewer from Prince Edward Island – our reach is wide! Whilst we would all like to be able to return to the hall for our meetings, Zoom lectures have actually proved very successful in strengthening links between local groups and in giving members who can't attend the hall a chance to hear our speakers. 81 connections were made for Sophy's fascinating presentation; probably well over 100 people. Technological advances are providing new information that simply wasn't available before, often applicable to finds from older excavations as well as for new interventions, as summarised below: **Finding Mesolithic Britain: Biomolecular Approaches to Hunter-Gatherer Archaeology**.

This month's Zoom lecture is on Wednesday 10th February at 7:30 by Paul Cheetham of Bournemouth University. His presentation is titled 300 Miles in the Footsteps of Vespasian – Lake Farm Roman legionary fortress, about the results of recent work at the fortress, particularly Dave Stewart's extensive geophysical examination.
As before, the Zoom link will be sent out a few days prior; those not normally receiving it can email a request to Andrew Morgan: andrewmorgz@aol.com

Another bumper set of **Weblinks** and **Highlights** from Alan Dedden in his series, first appearing in October 2017. There is much of interest, as well as links within the items that you can follow up further.

And I suggest you quickly check out Vanessa Joseph's item **Social history insight: Victorian Valentines** on page 6 for an event this Thursday.

Neil Meldrum has kindly provided the 7th in his series of articles on mankind's spiritual evolution, taking us into the start of 'civilisation' in one of the three earliest regions: **Into the Urban World 1 – Mesopotamia**. Complementing this is a more general article on one of the other early civilisations: **The Indus Valley Civilisation – an introduction.**

Jo Crane & Sue Newman's aerial photographs continue to show us more of our local heritage in **View from Above 34**, but there's no 'Remembering the Romans' this month. It will be back. And our young friend Finn Stileman has become 'famous': **Students build a Celtic Roundhouse**.

**Contributions and feedback to geoffnsue@hotmail.co.uk; please don't just 'REPLY'**

***Geoff Taylor***

## Finding Mesolithic Britain: Biomolecular Approaches to Hunter-Gatherer Archaeology: Zoom lecture by Sophy Charlton

Sophy's rather fetching attire illustrates that, whilst she is an archaeologist, she's now focusing on the science and has to be careful not to contaminate the samples being studied. Biological molecules can tell us a great deal about the past, and we're continually increasing the things we can learn. In this presentation Sophy looked at the Mesolithic (*c.*12,000-6,000 years ago), something of an 'ugly sister' of prehistory with little art and no monuments.

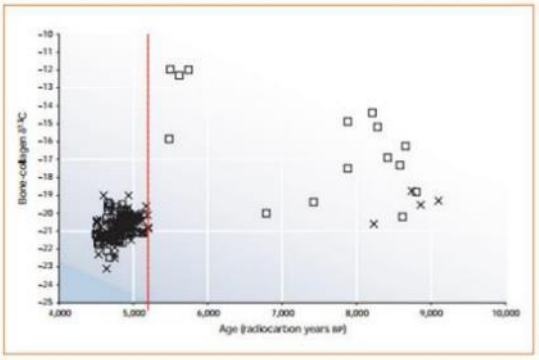
This was a period when small groups of hunter-gatherers moved seasonally, with their resting places often in watery locations, such as at Star Carr on the edge of Palaeo-Lake Flixton in Yorkshire. We do find lots of tools, like the characteristic microliths and barbed points, as well as antler frontlets – part of the skull and horns of deer, worn as masks with eye holes in them. They also occur on the Continent and may have been hunting disguises or used by shamans.

We also have a good deal of structural evidence, such as a house excavated at Hawick in the Scottish Borders; the reproduction shown here is in York [there are two at the Ancient Technology Centre in Cranborne]. Diet is fairly well-known too: animals such as aurochs (huge wild cattle) and wild boar, nuts and terrestrial plants. Later in the Mesolithic there's much more of a dependence on marine resources: things which we would eat like herring, mackerel and shellfish, but also marine animals that we usually wouldn't, like seals. As might be guessed from this, approaches to understanding the Mesolithic tend to be 'functional' – how the people lived and survived. But what we don't have in Britain is very much evidence of the people themselves.

Many Mesolithic burials have been found In continental Europe, sometimes in large cemeteries. In Denmark, one cemetery has 22 burials with the dead laid out on antlers or flint blocks. A similar sized cemetery in Brittany includes more lavish grave goods, such as bead necklaces, whilst one in Latvia with 300 graves has amber pendants and bone beads, with people having been wrapped (or, perhaps, bound) for burial. In Bavaria there are 'nests' of skulls painted with red ochre; the amount of cranial trauma suggests this may be the result of a massacre. There are many cemeteries in Scandinavia, whilst a Serbian settlement has burials under the floors with strange sculptures suggested as half men, half fish (only one piece of Mesolithic art has been found in Britain, at Star Carr).

Most of the Mesolithic human remain found in the UK are fragmentary pieces, with the only (near) complete skeleton being 'Cheddar Man', poorly excavated in 1903 from Gough's Cave, Cheddar Gorge. The only known Mesolithic cremation was found in Somerset and originally thought to be Bronze Age. Improved dating techniques, as in this case, give some hope that other remains may prove to be Mesolithic but how, pending more remains, can we best study Mesolithic people? Anthropology is one approach – looking at ethnographic parallels from people with similar lifestyles. This gives interesting possibilities but, of course, isn't specific to the actual people living then. Using scientific techniques seems much more promising, especially with relatively recent advances – the point of Sophy's lecture.

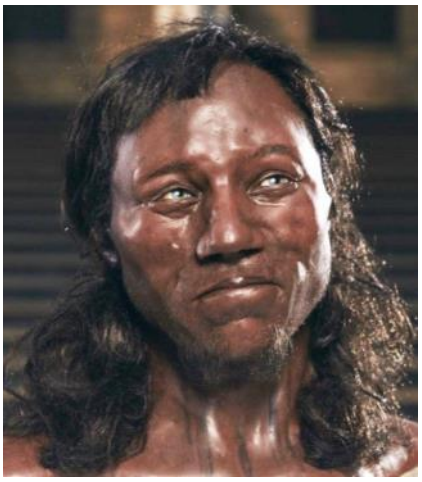
A good deal of work has been done on stable isotopes across Europe, particularly on the Mesolithic to Neolithic transition. Isotopes are the less common forms of an element with the same number of protons but different numbers of neutrons, and are incorporated into our tissues from the food we eat and what we drink. Unstable, or radioactive, isotopes decay over time; the basis of radiocarbon dating. Stable isotopes remain unchanged, so we can look at what remains in bones or teeth to find out about diet (particularly carbon and nitrogen) and people's origins (mainly strontium and oxygen).



The graph plots evidence of foodways going back over time, with the dark clump apparently showing a switch from mostly wild foods to mainly domesticated ones fairly rapidly as we enter the Neolithic (the red line). Just prior to that, in the later Mesolithic, the 3 higher squares seem to show a much greater preponderance of marine foods than before or after. There is no reason to think that marine resource levels changed, so perhaps the switch was because of a change in belief systems.

Ancient DNA ("aDNA") studies continue to become more sophisticated and have provided a great deal of new information over recent decades. For example, the genome sequence on 7,000 year old human remains from Spain shows a person with blue eyes but quite dark skin – surprisingly the lighter eye colour seems to have emerged before lighter skin. Studies show that hunter-gatherers in the Near East were genetically the same as the Neolithic farmers that followed, yet in Britain it appears that the Neolithic population completely replaced earlier Mesolithic hunter-gatherers.

The latter came from the first Mesolithic genetic studies in the UK, as recently as 2019, which used principal component analysis. This is a way of plotting genetic data to visualise genetic variations – the closer together on the plot, the smaller the variation. The British Mesolithic people (though only from 6 places) show a relatively small amount of variation, as do British Neolithic people (a much larger sample), but the Neolithic inhabitants are very different from the previous hunter-gatherers. In fact, the Neolithic people in the UK match best with contemporaries in Iberia; there is a definite change in the population rather than in cultural traits. This probably passes through France but French data isn't yet available to check.



Of the individuals, Cheddar Man is particularly interesting. The aDNA shows that this was a male living *c*.10,000 years ago, about 5 feet tall and in his early 20s. A complete genome was obtained and he was, similar to the Spanish person above, dark skinned with blue/green eyes, as shown in the reconstructed head. However, this was different from other samples in Europe, so it seems there were differences in skin pigmentation across Europe. He was also lactose intolerant, and it is becoming clear that this was very common for European adults in the Mesolithic.

European adaptation to milk is a very recent mutation and was thought to follow domestication of cattle. However, what appear to have been dairy herds may well not have been since few Neolithic people seem to have been tolerant of milk, with fairly low numbers even in the Bronze Age. It isn't common even now in some places, like parts of SE Asia.

Sophy has been working on items excavated at Cnoc Coig, one of 6 Mesolithic shell middens on Oronsay in the Inner Hebrides, first dug in 1911/12 but with better results in the 1970s. Structural evidence was found, as well as lots of artefacts and faunal remains, including 49 pieces of human bone. These were mainly hand and foot bones, belonging to 4 individuals, and dating to the late Mesolithic. Their scattered locations might suggest excarnation. During her PhD she managed to get 20 fragments of bone that weren't clearly identified, and aimed to find at least identification (particularly if human), date and dietary information.


The techniques used may sound baffling at first sight – ZooMS (Zooarchaeology by Mass Spectometry) and collagen peptide mass fingerprinting. In essence, she was looking at the sequence of amino acids in bone collagen which can identify species, a rather cheaper and easier approach than finding and analysing DNA. In fact, 14 of the fragments were human and the rest seal or pig. Earlier carbon and nitrogen stable isotope analysis had shown these late Mesolithic humans' diet was very high in marine foods – up to 100% in some cases. Testing her bone fragments produced few surprises – both humans and seals were dependent on marine resources, pigs weren't – except that one pig was consuming a good deal of marine food. Was this 'marine pig' fed by humans or eating human leftovers? Perhaps it was the only domesticated one and the rest were wild.

None of Sophy's human bones were from hands or feet, so that excarnation may be wrong. In fact, she found that her bones came from outside the midden, suggesting other missing bones might be there. She was also concerned about the dating, some of it done some years ago and with just 4 human bones analysed, giving dates of 4600-3900 BC for them and charcoal samples, but rather earlier for many of the shells tested 30 years ago. It was hoped that improved techniques would produce better, clearer, results and, in fact, her 4 bone samples showed dates of 4000-3700 BC – after the red line on the graph above.

So, analysing bone protein can provide valuable information without having to resort to DNA, which may not be recoverable. Sophy's results could alter previous thinking as there is, at least in one place in Northern Scotland, high marine consumption after the presumed cut off. Clearly the sample is small, but it suggests that perhaps new people didn't 'take over' there, for a while at least, and that the transition to Neolithic was later. We can probably say that there were different foodways in different places and, indeed, that lifestyles/food didn't change all at once (is a few hundred years really 'rapid' anyway?).

There wasn't enough aDNA in the Oronsay material, but Sophy wanted to look a little wider. The most likely place to find aDNA is in a particular bone of the inner ear, with just one Mesolithic excavation having produced one. She managed to get a sample of this and the analysis showed affinities to early Mesolithic people elsewhere, but not to Neolithic inhabitants of Britain. It seems that there were overlapping populations for a time and some mixing, but only around 2-3% of hunter-gatherer DNA is found in Early Neolithic people in Scotland and England. In Wales there is none at present.

It is, of course, possible that the new people, or animals, brought new diseases with them. In any case, the hunter-gatherer population would have been very small, so it wouldn't need much to 'take over'.

The Cnoc Coig work identified further human remains, added to the characterisation of diet and brought new questions about Mesolithic pigs and burial practices. It also questioned the conclusion that the foraging lifestyle was rapidly replaced by agriculture around 4000 BC. It showed that a lot can come from a little using new techniques, especially that bone protein analysis is a valuable approach. Whilst the lack of Mesolithic human remains in Britain is a major challenge, the techniques used here demonstrated that 'unidentifiable' bone fragments can provide very useful information; excavators shouldn't throw these sorts of things away.

There remains a lot to learn, of course, and many puzzles. For example, one questioner pointed out that British early Neolithic ceramics show strong parallels to the decorative style of *Linearbandkeramik* – i.e. from Central Europe rather than the Iberian origins suggested here. It is, though, clear that lots of people were moving even in early prehistory.

For those wanting to learn more about this fascinating subject, explained by Sophy in a very accessible way, her 2016 paper in the Journal of Archaeological Science is available on open access here.

***Geoff Taylor***

## Web Link Highlights January 2021

Another good crop of weblinks covering a wide range of subjects. An obvious highlight is the delightful story of the 4 year old finding a dinosaur footprint. The same day this surfaced I had, by chance, been listening to *Open Country* on Radio 4 which featured the writer Julia Blackburn and her love of the Suffolk coast. She is particularly interested in its connections with Doggerland – artefacts disturbed by trawlers, or dredging, and washed up on the beach, or revealed by the crumbling cliffs. Julia asks Professor Martin Bell of Reading University to show her the areas of the Severn Estuary he has been investigating for 30 years. Within 5 minutes of arriving at the site, Julia spotted and picked up a Palaeolithic flint point from 30,000bp. As Professor Bell remarks, it shows that remarkable finds can be made by enthusiasts as well as experienced professionals.

There is also the latest chapter in the story of the domestication of wolves and their evolution into pet dogs. Having lived with four Siberian Huskies, it comes as no surprise at all that it is now thought pet dogs originated in Siberia. Indeed, around 20 years ago there was a fashion for people owning what they were told were wolves, most of which were actually Siberian Huskies. Note: wolves are wild animals and do not make safe pets.

***Alan Dedden***

## January Weblinks

- **Dance Floor Where John The Baptist Was Condemned Identified** (possibly) here
- **Another Hampshire Garden Find - This Time A Roman Engraved Marble Slab** here
- **Raids Find 'Gargantuan' Trove Of Stolen Artifacts** here
- **Why Was Stonehenge Built?** (Spoiler alert - don't expect an answer!) here
- **Victorian Bathhouse Uncovered In Manchester Car Park** here
- **Tomb Of Murderous Chinese Emperor Finally Identified** here
- **World's Oldest Known Animal Cave Painting In Indonesia** (more on January Bulletin item) here
- **Key That Unlocked Napoleon's Prison Sold At Auction** here
- **Dinosaur Fossils Found In Argentine Could Be Largest To Have Walked The Earth** here
- **Pioneer Fossil Hunter Mary Anning To Get Statue** here
- **Evidence Of Cannibalism And Reprisal Revealed By Mexico Archaeologists** here
- **Henry III Gold Penny Goes For £526,000 At Auction** here
- **New Light On Darwin's 'Abominable Mystery'** here
- **1,500 Year Old 'Christ, Born Of Mary' Inscription Found In Israel** here
- **Anglo-Saxon Cemetery And Bronze Age Barrows And Buildings Found In Northamptonshire** here
- **19th Century Tlingit Fort Discovered In Alaska** here
- **The Origins Of Modern Pet Dogs** here
- **Bone Analysis Hints At Causes Of Medieval Deaths** here
- **6,500 Medieval Coins And Rare Gold Rings Found In Polish Cornfield** here
- **Cursus Found On Isle Of Arran** here
- **Armada Maps Saved For The Nation** here
- **Thomas Becket Stained Glass Window Restored To Original Order** here

- **Napoleon's Account Of Austerlitz On Sale In Paris** here
- **16th Century Manor House Garden Found At Coleshill** here
- **20 Million Year Old Petrified Tree Largely Intact Found In Greece** here
- **Bog Beetles Finally Reveal Their Age** here
- **Long Lost Medieval Kingdom Found In China** here
- **'Regal' Purple Dye From The Time Of Kings Solomon And David Found** here
- **Puppy Paw Prints And Wall Illusions Found In 1,500 Year Old House In Turkey** here
- **Stunning Eagle Sculpture Found At Aztec Temple** here
- **Dinosaur Footprint Found By 4 Year Old Girl On Barry Beach** here
- **Many Finds At Early Medieval Graveyard In Cambridge** here

***It would be great if anyone would send interesting links to Alan at*** alan.dedden@gmail.com

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## Social history insight: Victorian Valentines

In 1872, John Low closed the stationer's shop on the High Street in Wimborne with strict instructions that it was not to be re-opened during his lifetime. In 1904, when Tom Coles re-opened the old stationer's shop, he found most of the original stock intact. The cards from John Low's shop form one of the best collections of Valentines in existence. They are regarded as being of national importance and form an important element of the collections of the Museum of East Dorset.

In his talk, ***Love's Gift: A History of Victorian Valentine Cards***, Mark Neathey, MED's Collections Officer, uses examples from the museum's own fascinating collection to discuss how the Victorians contributed to the Valentine tradition. Not every Valentine card was sent with love in mind.


The online talk takes place on **Thursday 11th February at 7:00**. Afterwards, there is an opportunity to ask Mark any questions you wish related to the collection. For more information on how to join in this virtual event, please see the link below.

You can also find out more about Roman cuisine with Mark & Jill from *Tastes of History*. Roman recipes included! **Move quickly though**, this is on **Thursday 4th February at 7:00**.

**https://museumofeastdorset.co.uk/events/**

***Vanessa Joseph***

## Dorset Council Local Plan

Dave Keig sent me two links to items on Dorset Council's proposed strategy to 2038:

- A You Tube video on the plans for Wimborne & Colehill: **here**
- And a more general critique of contradictions in the plan from the Echo **here**

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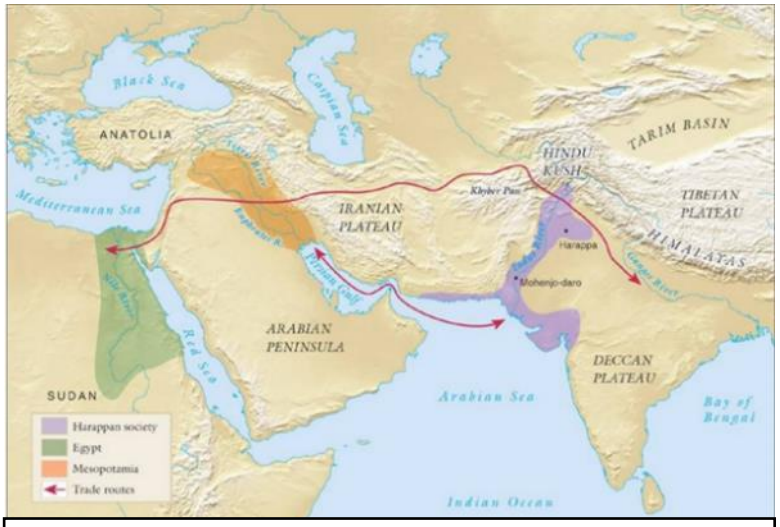
The **CBA Wessex February Newsletter** can be found at this link with links to further items.

Lancaster University's 48th Annual Archaeology Forum may be of interest (mostly Roman); it will be online Saturday 6th March, with the lectures available before (and after) – see here for information and booking (£20 with a discount for Roman Society members).

## Into the Urban World 1 – Mesopotamia

The Chalcolithic period, approximately 5000 to 3000 BCE (dates do vary considerably), is the period that saw the onset of the Bronze Age and, traditionally, the establishment of civilisation in certain tiny areas of the world. But what is civilisation? Just because a people may live in a large town, practise intensive large-scale agriculture, and necessarily have a more complex political and social organization, does this make that people more civilised in the sense of culture? A modern-day New Guinea tribesman can be as cultured as a New York urbanite; he may lack the trappings of the modern urban life style, but is he any less cultured in the sense of civility and behaviour? I doubt it.

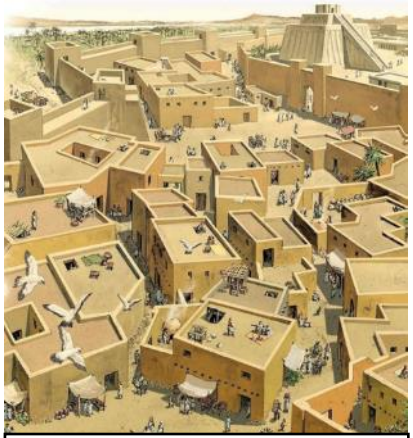
Therefore, in looking at the 'ancient civilisations' of Mesopotamia onwards, what we are really talking about is urbanisation and material culture rather than, perhaps, civilisation or cultural behaviour in its broadest sense.




**The very earliest urban cultures: Egypt, Mesopotamia and the Indus Valley.**

The period from about 5000 BCE onwards saw a marked increase in population, coupled with a considerable intensification of agriculture in certain areas, from Egypt in the west across to the Zagros mountains in Iran and beyond to the Indus River in the east. These areas saw considerable advances in material culture, culminating in the early river valley urban cultures of Lower Mesopotamia, Egypt and the Indus Valley. In this article and the next two I will focus on these three first centres of urbanisation, not because they were the only centres of culture but because far more is known about them than in the rest of the contemporary world.

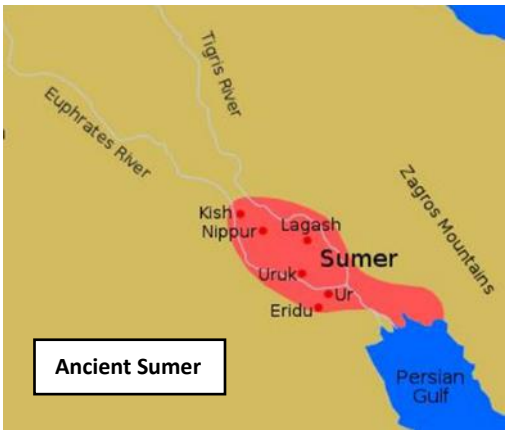
Population levels are interesting. It has been suggested that the worldwide human population may have increased from less than half a million to perhaps 5 million between 10000 and 5000 BCE. However, in the next 5,000 years the world population may have risen inexorably to a figure in excess of 500 million!



**A plausible reconstruction of Eridu.**

The Ubaid culture in Mesopotamia, *c*.5000 BCE, was possibly the first truly urban culture. It was the people of this culture who, around 5000 BCE, first drained the marshes and constructed the original irrigation canals in the area known as Lower Mesopotamia, a marshy land even today. The ancient site of Eridu is the main archaeological site of this Ubaid culture; around 4500 BCE it may have had a population of up to 12,000. But very little can be discerned of this early culture – nobody really knows who these people were or where they came from. It appears that they were possibly the first anywhere in the world to have an intensive irrigation farming economy, to live in large towns, possibly the first to have specialised trades and an increasingly sophisticated hierarchal system. I say 'possibly' because it is becoming increasingly apparent that there may have been earlier cultures in this area. The problem is that, quite apart from the political turmoil in the region, excavation is difficult because the sites have been overlaid so many times by subsequent settlement and so many layers of sediment from river flooding.

The fourth millennium BCE was a crucial period in the history of Humankind; the period when the Sumerians established their urban culture. Again, nobody is quite sure where they originally hailed from, but in settling into the region of Lower Mesopotamia they quickly assimilated the previous Ubaid culture, which virtually disappeared around 3800 BCE. Sumer has been translated as 'the land of the civilised kings'. Legend has it that the Sumerian city of Uruk was founded in about 4500 BCE; it went on to become the largest urban centre so far, the first that could be classed as a city rather than a large town. It was from here that Sumerian culture spread and flourished over the whole of Southern Mesopotamia for over 2,000 years.




The Sumerians were not the inventors of urban culture, as this developed over a period of many millennia, but they were innovators. The sailboat, the wheel, the horse drawn chariot, the development of metallurgy and writing were all fundamental to the cultural and material progression of Humankind. Now whether these and other inventions were the original work of the Sumerians, or whether they were adopted and customised by them from previous developments (more likely the case), does not really matter. What matters is that the Sumerians clearly had a genius for human organisation and adaptation and successfully integrated all these various developments into a sophisticated urban culture.

Conceivably the most revolutionary of all these advances was writing. It is possible that the idea of conveying thoughts by some form of signs had evolved elsewhere (look at what appear to be such signs on some of the stelae at Göbekli Tepe millennia earlier), but it was the Sumerians who first developed writing into a recognisable form. Whether writing, or perhaps more accurately the idea of writing, developed entirely independently in different cultures is very much a moot point. It probably did in China and almost certainly did in Mexico; elsewhere, who knows? But it was the Sumerians who for the first time in human history left a written record available for posterity. Writing marks the dividing line between history and prehistory.

The first evidence of writing comes from Uruk towards the end of the fourth millennium BCE, known as proto-cuneiform (left), the precursor to the later famous Sumerian cuneiform writing (right), a wedge shaped script which has now mostly been deciphered. The proto-cuneiform script was not sufficiently sophisticated to express ideas but was used extensively in record keeping and accounting. Although this writing did not provide a great deal of information about the culture or what the people of Uruk were thinking, it does give us considerable insights into how early Sumerian society was organised.

The population of Uruk at its height, *c*.3200 BCE, was possibly in the region of 30,000 with an ever-increasing number of diverse occupations. There was, however, no differentiation between the secular and the religious. The ruler was both high priest and king; there was no view that these were separate functions. The priest/king ruled as the representative of the god or gods of the particular city. The temple, always located in the very centre of the city, was the focal point of all city life, commercial, administrative and religious.

**A plausible reconstruction of the temple at the centre of Uruk (possibly a little later than the period in this article).**

**Statue of a dignitary or priest from Uruk *c.*3000 BC, possibly a priest/king.**

These temples weren't just places of public worship, but were considered the earthly home of the city's deity. It was acknowledged that the idol in the temple was not the god – what was envisaged was that the spirit of the god resided in the temple when not residing in the heavens (or he may have resided in both simultaneously). The inner sanctum of these temples was reserved for the priest/king or his deputies. Mysterious ceremonies would be performed in private in the company only of the spirit of the god, and the god's messages would then be passed to the people. The messages would actually have been rather worldly; the Sumerian religious system from a very early stage was always more orientated towards practical and economic ends rather than esoteric or spiritual ends.

The Sumerian view was that kingship came down from heaven, but how divine that kingship was remains unclear. The nature of the gods was changing and during the course of the third millennium BCE they became more humanised and warlike. The expansion of writing brought about the desire to describe the gods, accentuating the compulsion to render the gods in humankind's own image. Human emotions, traits and attributes were implanted into the gods, and they became powerful and immortal superhumans. As militarism came to the fore, battles between cities became battles between the respective gods of those cities. These battles were fought in the name of the gods, not the kings. The Sumerian word for god was *ilu* meaning literally 'lofty person' (transliterated as Elohim in Hebrew and Allah in Arabic).

So what came first, the dominance of kings or the increasing military nature of the gods? It was probably a symbiotic development. In early Sumerian days there do not seem to have been gods of war, but as the kings became more powerful they started to assume aspects of divinity. This, I think, characterises the temporal outlook of the Mesopotamians – these kings started to acquire aspects of divinity because of their military success.

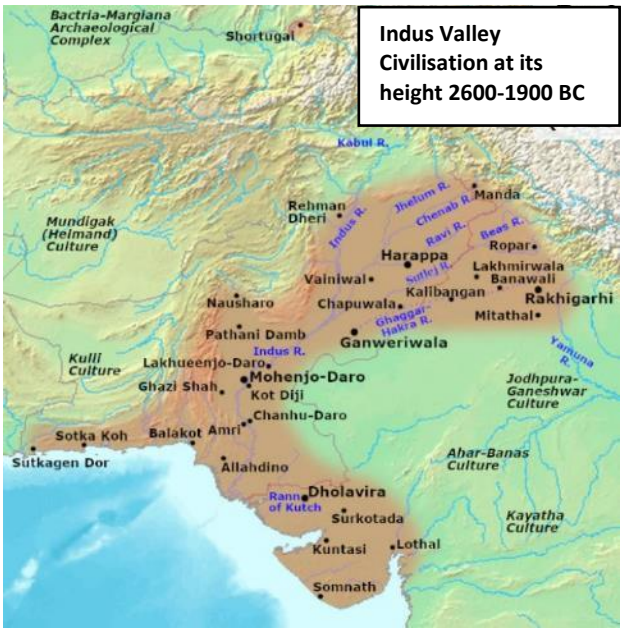
**The Ziggurat at Ur (c.2350 BCE)**

As we reach the end of the third millennium we are no longer talking about the Sumerians but the Akkadians – a Semitic militaristic people who had come down from the north and began to dominate the Sumerian city states, starting a process of centralisation. A new type of ruler emerged, the world's first empire builders. With empire came increased self-importance, a phenomena which we shall discuss in a later article. In my next article I will look at the Old Kingdom in Egypt and how its development took a rather different course from that in Mesopotamia.

***Neil Meldrum***

## The Indus Valley Civilisation – an introduction

This article is loosely based on an essay I wrote as a first year Archaeology student in 2004. This was probably the first essay that I'd written since I was at school over 35 years earlier and, in retrospect, it wasn't that good. Of course, knowledge of this area and its sites has moved on since then, though I've not had to update very much.




**Indus Valley Civilisation at its height 2600-1900 BC**

Despite this being one of the great early civilisations during the Bronze Age, from 3300-1300 BC, it is relatively unknown. I am struggling to remember any documentary about it, whilst there have been many on the contemporary civilisations of ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia and even early China. At its height the Indus Valley Civilisation ("IVC") covered an area of 650,000km$^2$, greater than any of the other three.

Perhaps the relative obscurity is partly because of its location: growth of the culture, sometimes called Harappan after one of the major cities, was along the Indus Valley and its tributaries, down the centre of Pakistan, covering most of that country. Settlement then spread east into India and northwest into a small part of Afghanistan. The lack of publicity may also relate to our knowing little of their history, as the Harappan script still hasn't been deciphered.

**Most Harappan inscriptions are short like this seal, 5 or 6 symbols of the 400+ known, making deciphering them difficult. Some even question whether this IS writing.**

First discovered by Europeans in the 1820s, serious archaeological work didn't start for almost a century, but excavations then continued until 1946. Thereafter, partly due to the disruption surrounding the partition of India and its aftermath but also because of a concentration on Pakistan's Islamic heritage, little was done. 'HARP' (Harappa Archaeological Research Project) commenced excavations in 1986 although, of course, they aren't the only excavators and researchers. HARP's work continues, most recently discovering the origins of Harappa as a small village around 3500 BC and the beginning of writing in the following few centuries. It isn't completely clear whether this earlier date can be considered the start of the Harappan culture.

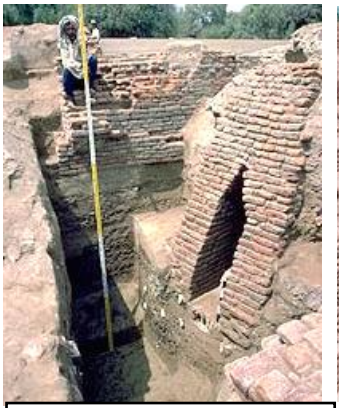
The fact that this was probably a widespread undiscovered civilisation was recognised in the 1920s, but it is still debated whether this was under a single authority. Excavations at two of the main cities, Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro, and then at some of the smaller 'regional centres' and even smaller villages, showed clear similarities in urban design and material culture. It was obvious that there were strong economic and cultural links between all of these places, but evidence of political and ideological integration has proved quite elusive and there remain competing theories.

Besides Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa, with populations up to about 50,000 at their height, other large cities are known at Ganeriwala, also in Pakistan, and Dholavira and Rhakigarhi in India. I've not been able to find any evidence of excavation at Ganeriwala, but the two Indian cities have been partially excavated, at least. Many of the smaller urban centres and other settlements, now known to exceed 1,000 in number, have also been subject to archaeological intervention.

The range of features that characterise the IVC are quite extensive and, to some extent, draw

comparison with some we think of as characterising ancient Rome, albeit considerably earlier. In particular, they had the world's first known urban sanitation systems: groups of houses, generally around inner courtyards, drew water from specially constructed local wells, and almost every house, despite their often small sizes, had its own bathroom linked to covered drains and sewers.

**Public well and clothes-washing area in Harappa. It is possible this was also used for ceremonies.**

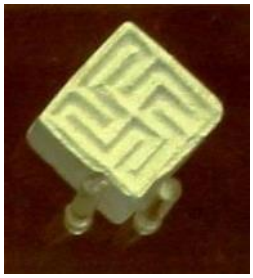


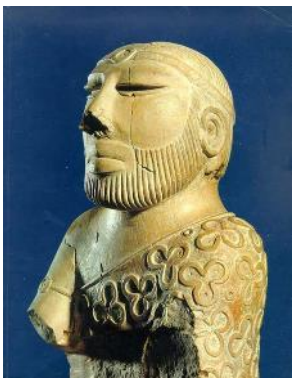
**Corbelled drain for rainwater and sewage in Harappa, linked to the city-wide system.**

**Stepwell in Dholavira, presumably needed because of a relatively low water table there.**

Further evidence of a strong central authority comes in urban planning, as seen in Mohenjo-Daro – compounds of houses and workshops built on large mud-brick platforms along a network of streets, often paved, and with similar crafts grouped into their own areas. Cities and larger towns were walled, although this seems as likely to have been for protection from monsoon floods as for defence. Houses were usually single storey, built of sun-dried bricks, all of a standard size; some were of baked mud-brick and 2 storeyed. All the houses were, though, relatively small and with small rooms and narrow passageways. It seems likely that much of daily life took place out of doors.


Social differentiation and hierarchy has proved very difficult to see, even with the differences in house types. Within the 85ha city of Harappa there is a smaller, walled area known as 'the citadel', with larger, non-residential public buildings; similar areas seem to have existed in all the major cities. The purpose of these large buildings remains uncertain, and none were particularly monumental. There is no evidence of palaces or temples, nor of kings, armies or priests, even if the 17.5cm high statue shown has been called the 'Priest-King' of Mohenjo-Daro. Excavators in the early to mid-20th century identified various items as relating to a proto-Hindu religious system, including swastika seals now held by the British Museum. Most experts now disagree with such interpretations and feel that we really have little idea of IVC religion. Of course, this is one of many areas where deciphering their script, if such it is, could make a big difference to understanding. Perhaps the best view of the 'script' so far, is that it "codes an unknown language", which doesn't sound very hopeful.





Burial is one area where some social hierarchy can be seen but there is no sign of an elite or any royalty. Although there was some cremation, particularly after the 'mature' phase of 2600-1900 BC, burials were generally in wooden coffins along with pottery vessels similar to the type shown and some simple ornaments. Differentiation is limited to the type, size and number of pots and the richness of the ornaments, though the distinctions aren't great.

The rise of Harappan civilisation seems to have been based on extensive trade or exchange, with a highly standardised system of weights used, as in the graduated cubical weights shown (the smallest is 0.856gm). Internally this is reflected in the widespread distribution of specialised products made in the cities and larger urban centres. A particular hallmark was the production of beads and jewellery, where fired steatite (soapstone) was a frequently used material that was also used for many of the thousands of seals that have been found. The IVC may have been among the first civilisations to use wheeled transport, particularly bullock carts.


Evidence for widespread external trade is seen in items found in the cities, such as carnelian from the Persian Gulf, shells from southern India and jade from central Asia. It appears that they may well have developed sea-going craft to trade further afield. Although no remains of such ships have been found, archaeologists have found a large canal and docking facility at the coastal city of Lothal, whilst a seal from Mohenjo-Daro appears to show an ocean-going vessel. IVC artefacts have been found through Afghanistan, coastal Persia and particularly in Mesopotamia, with some suggestions of trade links as far as Crete and Egypt.

Initially there was a 'colonialist' view that the strong links with Mesopotamia meant that the IVC was an imported culture. Excavations in Mehrgarh, on the far western side of the Indus valley, suggested otherwise. This was one of the earliest Neolithic sites in southern Asia, dating from around 7000 BC and, though with apparent influences from the Near East, seems to be entirely indigenous. Developments in pottery, agriculture and the domestication of animals can be traced through to the early phases of the Indus Valley culture.

The rise in the Harappan culture seems to have related to changes in the pattern of monsoons, particularly a slow southward movement. That reduced the flooding of the Indus and its tributaries, allowing increasing agricultural surpluses and the development of larger urban areas. The decline of the civilisation after about 1900 BC, movement of its population and their influence on subsequent development in the region, remains slightly uncertain. Sir Mortimer Wheeler had a typically military reason, suggesting that the decline related to invasion by an Indo-European tribe of 'Aryans', based on discoveries of many damaged skulls in cemeteries. It soon became clear that the damage was natural erosion, and most explanations now centre on continuing changes in the monsoons, e.g. leading to the drying up of several of the Indus tributaries (hence, perhaps, the need for stepwells as above). However, whilst cultural indicators did change, excavations in Harappa suggest that the population may actually have increased.

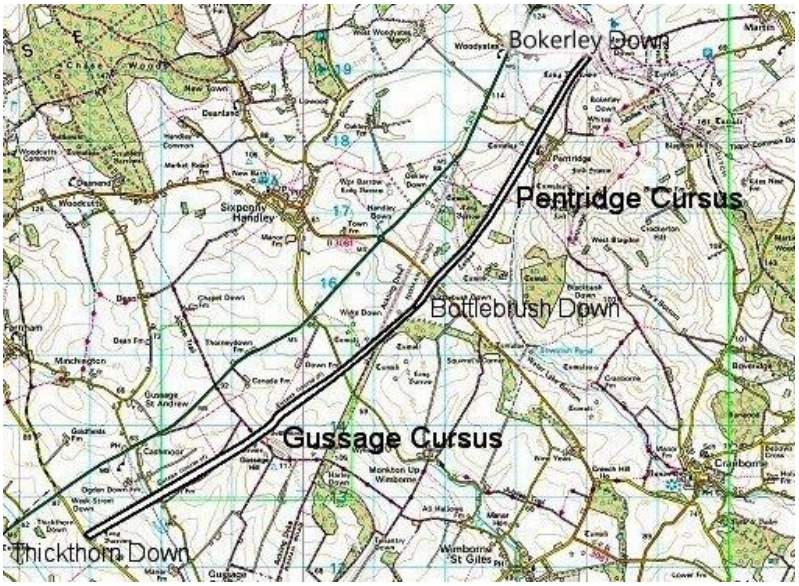
***Geoff Taylor***

## View from Above No 34:
## Dorset Cursus 1

***Photo by Sue Newman and Jo Crane***

Previous newsletters have shown and mentioned parts of the Dorset Cursus, e.g. where Ackling Dyke crosses it and the section on Gussage Down which has a long barrow across it. This View from Above looks at the cursus overall and at the south-western end, shown in the aerial photograph.

William Stukeley discovered the Stonehenge Cursus in 1723, and it was he who described it as a "cursus". He thought it to have been a racecourse, likening it to a Roman circus though recognising that it was much older, as did Richard Colt Hoare who discovered the Dorset Cursus almost a century later. It is about 10km or 6 miles long, three times as long as the Stonehenge Cursus, crossing Cranborne Chase from Thickthorn Down in the south-west to Bokerley Down in the north-east. Most of the north-eastern part of Pentridge Cursus was not known until 1955, e.g. a map of the cursus from 1947 shows it ending well to the south-west of Pentridge village.




Although considered the longest cursus in the UK, it should actually be considered as two cursuses – Gussage Cursus to the south-west and Pentridge Cursus to the north-east, joining on Bottlebrush Down a little way to the east of Ackling Dyke. Its parallel banks are about 90m apart, with external ditches, which limited excavation suggests were around 1-1.4m deep. In places, at least, there are traces of an earlier, smaller ditch, and sausage-like lengths where it sems that the larger ditch was only dug intermittently.

Dating remains slightly uncertain because of the limited number of excavations (I only know of ones in 1982 & 1984) but the cursus is thought to have been built around 3300 BC. It appears that the slightly longer Gussage Cursus came first, though the Pentridge Cursus was perhaps not built very much later. It does seem that construction was later than the long barrows close to each terminus and that lying across it on Gussage Down. The shape of the termini and changes in alignment to match and include these barrows suggest it was built as a grand avenue to link and incorporate them.

It is estimated that construction took about half a million man hours, but its actual purpose remains uncertain. In the usual archaeological way it is thought to have had ritual or ceremonial use. That is plausible, but not very specific of course, though there is a little evidence that it may relate to excarnation areas where bodies were left to decompose naturally – perhaps an 'avenue of the ancestors'. The only significant astronomical alignment is for an observer at the Gussage Cursus terminal on Bottlebush Down, who would see the midwinter sun set behind the long barrow across the cursus on Gussage Down (see previous newsletter).

As can be seen in the photograph, the south-western Thickthorn Down terminus, once thought to be an enclosure, is still upstanding. Two Bronze Age burial mounds can be seen beyond the two long barrows, whilst a linear earthwork heads further westward to the right of the road.

***Jo Crane/Geoff Taylor***

## Students build a Celtic Roundhouse

You'll no doubt remember our young friend Finn Stileman, who worked with us at Druce from when he was 15 and recently gained a First Class degree in Archaeology from UCL (see September 2020 newsletter). During lockdown, he and his girlfriend built a roundhouse at his parents' home near Dorchester. They plan to build a Saxon *grubenhaus* (or 'Sunken Featured Building') and maybe even a Roman villa after that. We'll look forward to hearing more about that.

I think articles on this appeared in several places, no doubt under the 'theme' of things to do in lockdown, but I saw it at this page on the BBC website (with Finn's name misspelt).

### Egypt – a follow-up

If you were struck by the awful approach of archaeologists (etc.) to Egyptian antiquities in the article on Karnak & Luxor (January bulletin), Toby Wilkinson has recently published a book on the history of Egyptology: *A World Beneath the Sands: Adventurers and Archaeologists in the Golden Age of Egyptology* (2020, Picador). Things were even worse than the picture I painted.

For a 'summary', the London Review of Books' review is a good start, and this link should get you to it (you should be able to just delete the 'Create Account' pop-up, but let me know if you have problems and I'll pass on the pdf that Jim Stacey kindly sent me).

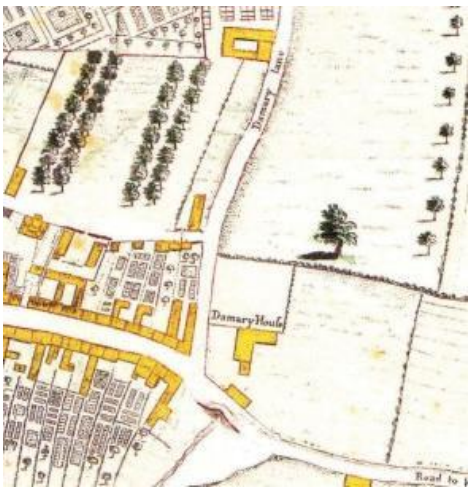
There are lots of other reviews online, though none I found had nearly as much information. I particularly liked the phrase in Tom Holland's review in the Guardian: the "history of the golden age of Egyptology is also very much a history of western willy-waving".

## Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History and Archaeology Society


- Having consolidated our holdings of the Proceedings, we now have the following volumes available for members to borrow as and when needed: 7-22, 26, 52 to date (vol. 141).
- Clearly we would need to discuss how to arrange that in current conditions, or it might be possible for me to scan and email shorter articles – contact Geoff at geoffnsue@hotmail.co.uk
- To check which volume an article is in, use the index here

**We also have spare copies of volumes 79-127 which are available free** to anyone who would like one or more. Otherwise I'm afraid they will be binned (they can't be recycled because of the glue in the binding, etc.).

## The Damory Oak, Blandford




Some of the details may just be local legend, but there is good evidence that this huge oak tree stood on the outskirts of Blandford until the mid-18th century. It was over 22m (75 feet) high and 7m (23 feet) across at ground level, probably one of the largest ever to grow in England. No one knows how old it was, but it was thought to have been mature by the 14th century.

The oak stood just to the north of the large Damory Court house, the home of the Ryves family from 1549 until the 18th century. The origins of the name could be the William D'Amory (or D'Amorie) who was a follower of William the Conqueror; the family became Damory at some stage and had particularly important and influential members in the 14th century.

However, there's no record of them owning land in Dorset, and it's more likely that the name is a corruption of Dame Marie, relating to the French Order of St. Marie which was granted land in the area around 1200. The manor passed to the Crown after the Dissolution and became known as 'Damariscourt'; the house was 'Damory courte' by the time Robert Ryves bought it.

Being on the edge of Blandford, Damory Court survived the Great Fire of 1731 but burnt down in 1845. Its name, though not quite its location, is remembered in a local street, with two other streets bearing the Damory name in Blandford.

The Damory Oak was said to have been struck by a bolt of lightning during a tremendous storm in the 1580s, splitting the lower trunk on the western side. With the damage, later weathering and decay, the centre became hollow, eventually becoming 15 feet across and 17 feet high, and able to hold 20 people. One Nathanael Cox is reputed to have lived in the oak around the time of the Civil War, and to have sold ale from it. Despite serious damage in another storm in 1703, two families are thought to have lived in the oak for a time after their homes were destroyed in the Blandford Fire. The picture here, of the Damory Oak in 1747, shows the split trunk, with most of the remaining branches in full leaf, yet it was sold for £14 in 1755 and cut down for firewood.

The Damory coach and bus company was set up in the 1970s and apparently took its name from the Damory Arms in Blandford, which closed in 2001. The oak itself was only commemorated by the Damory Oak public house but, sadly, that has also now closed (not because of coronavirus).

## EDAS 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**

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|---|---|---|---|
| **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)**