



Founded 1983

East Dorset Antiquarian Society

Charity No: 1171828

www.dorset-archaeology.org.uk

mail@dorset-archaeology.org.uk



<https://www.facebook.com/dorset.archaeology>

Edited by Geoff Taylor geoffnsue@hotmail.co.uk, Tel: 01202 840166

NEWSLETTER – May 2026

Dear EDAS members,

We are very pleased that Miles Russell is returning to speak at our next meeting on Wednesday 13th, 7 for 7:30, on 'Piltown Man: Adventures in archaeological forgery' - about Charles Dawson finding the 'missing link' in 1912 and becoming a global celebrity, only for his discovery to be exposed as a hoax 40 years later.

There's more about, or thanks to, Miles in this newsletter, especially as he's our **New honorary EDAS member**. I should say, as Morecambe and Wise might have said, all the titles of articles in this newsletter are shown in bold in this introduction, but not necessarily in the right order!

Miles' lecture is, of course, the last of this 'season', and there's information about the next season, starting in September, in the short item: **EDAS 2026-27 Programme**. As I'm away for a while in July, the Midsummer Newsletter will be later in that month than usual.

There are three articles in this newsletter where your replies are needed fairly soon if you're interested in taking up the opportunities that are offered:

- We've passed on some information to members about the use of our GPR machine, which has done a number of surveys as Robert Heaton learns more about its capabilities. It is proving a valuable addition to the society in widening our contacts and increasing archaeological knowledge, but we often can't say much about the work for some time. Occasionally that might be so as not to draw unwanted attention to a site, but there's often a delay before the results can be fully analysed and other evidence assessed, sometimes by an excavation that can't be publicised for a time. Permission to reveal details is also needed from interested parties, particularly landowners and excavators.

This month's newsletter has a couple of relevant articles, and a chance for people to get closer to the work in Ian Richardson's article **YOUR CHANCE TO GET INVOLVED IN FIELDWORK**, where you need to reply to him by Sunday 19th May if you're interested.

- As in previous years, there's an opportunity to visit Bournemouth University's excavation at Winterborne Kingston on Friday 26th June: **Durotriges Project 'Big Dig' visit**. Replies to Karen Brown by 19th May please.
- There's also an opportunity for a guided visit to Cerne Abbas, including Janet & Gordon Bartlett's beautiful Tudor house: **Cerne Abbas guided visit on Tuesday 30th June 2026**. Places are limited, so it will be first come, first served: replies to Janet & Gordon as soon as you can.

Many thanks to Phil for his summary of last month's lecture by John Wainwright: **Landscapes and early agriculture in Türkiye**. Thanks also to Vanessa for the article on research underway at the Museum of East Dorset: **Further analysis of animal bones from Tarrant Hinton**. I'm also grateful to her, and to Robert Heaton, for a short item about a different sort of research there: **GPR at the museum**.

Continuing the survey theme, but about a different scientific method, there's an article about work to discover if there is/was a tunnel between the church at Lytchett Matravers and the old manor house: **ERT (electrical resistivity tomography) at Lytchett Matravers Church**.

As well as the article above, Ian has provided a note about the excavations at **Keepers Cottage, Stalbridge**, where Robert has also done a small GPR survey to help in the work. I gather that someone there with divining rods is very successful at locating features; you don't always need expensive equipment!

Once again, Alan Dedden has provided the results of his discoveries of archaeological news on the internet from around the world: **Weblinks No. 87** and **Weblink Highlights May 2026**. There's also information here about **Poole Maritime Trust** and from the **Council for British Archaeology, Wessex**.

Many thanks to Keira at the Ancient Technology Centre who sent round the journal article on which **Viking funerals and burials 1** is based. Number 2 will, of course, follow. Then there's **View from Above 79: Strip lynchets**, but no room this time for 'From the Archives'.

As always, the **EDAS Programme** and **District Diary** complete the newsletter

Geoff Taylor

YOUR CHANCE TO GET INVOLVED IN FIELDWORK

As you will be aware from newsletter articles and the AGM papers, EDAS recently purchased a share of some GPR (ground penetrating radar) equipment, jointly with Poole Maritime Trust. For that we thank a legacy from one of our members, Val Moore.

As the weather is now improving, and conditions becoming more favourable for this type of surveying, the committee has been drawing together a number of target sites. Robert has already begun some trial surveys with the machine and has produced some very interesting results.

Going forward, we are looking to put together a team/teams to assist in one or more of the following areas:

Surveying

Going to the site and physically assisting in the survey work, this will entail walking an often considerable distance over uneven surfaces, pegging out grids and guiding equipment across the site. The locations vary throughout Dorset, but you may wish to volunteer for only a limited geographical area.

Research

Desk based research of the target site – to help gain a fuller picture on what is likely to be dealt with as well as providing a background to the area involved.

Recording and Reporting

To assist in the completion of survey records and in the interpretation and production of a final report of the results.

We anticipate surveys being carried out on a fairly ad-hoc basis, predominately during Spring and Summer and unlikely to be more than 1 or 2 per month.

If you feel you have any skills/experience or, in any case, are able to commit to being involved in this **please contact Ian Richardson at: [windowdiver222@gmail.com](mailto>windowdiver222@gmail.com) by Sunday 19th May**. Once we have an idea of numbers, we can arrange a meeting to discuss all aspects further. I'll look forward to hearing from you.

Ian Richardson

Durotriges Project 'Big Dig' visit

With thanks to Miles Russell, once again Lilian Ladle and Karen Brown have kindly arranged an exclusive visit to Bournemouth University's Big Dig at Winterborne Kingston, jointly with the Wareham and District Archaeology and Local History Society. You'll be able to view the current excavations, see the finds and hear the latest thoughts regarding the development of this iconic Dorset site.

That is on **Friday 26th June at 10am**, meeting in the farmyard west of the village, with parking details to follow. As before, transport can be arranged up to the site, about a mile away.

If you want to join the group, please email Karen Brown karen.brown68@btinternet.com by **Sunday 19th May at the latest and say if you need transport**. She will provide full details nearer the time.

Cerne Abbas guided visit on Tuesday 30th June 2026 An opportunity to visit a Tudor house and the village

EDAS stalwarts Janet and Gordon Bartlet have kindly offered to host a trip for small groups of interested members around their beautiful Tudor home in the historic village of Cerne Abbas. With a broad knowledge of the medieval history of the town, its surviving buildings and monastery, they are also happy to share their knowledge by leading a walk to their choice of the most interesting places. For those who are interested Gordon has agreed to provide demonstrations of some of the pieces in his impressive working collection of historical musical devices

The proposed date for the event is Tuesday 30th June 2026, probably from 11am, but they would be happy to consider an additional weekend date in July (18th or 19th) if there's sufficient interest.

If you are interested, email gordonbartlet@gmail.com and they'll reply with more details.

Note: Janet has been involved in several excavations with EDAS and other organisations, including the recent investigations of the monastery site by Sheffield University. She has written three newsletter articles about Cerne Abbas (Midsummer 2021, March and April 2024), including information about their home (pictured) and the Giant.

Gordon is an avid collector of historical memorabilia in his areas of interest. Within the last three years he has given talks at EDAS meetings on 'The rise and decline of Bournemouth and Poole tramways' and (using working equipment) about 'How music began in every home' (newsletters October 2023 and December 2024).



Phil D'Eath

Landscapes and early agriculture in Türkiye - EDAS lecture by John Wainwright

John Wainwright spoke about research exploring how environmental conditions have impacted upon on, and been impacted by, human activity since some of the earliest sedentary communities settled in Turkey. John is Professor of Geography at Durham University, where his earlier archaeological degree links to a broader interest in landscapes and how they have been harnessed for agriculture.

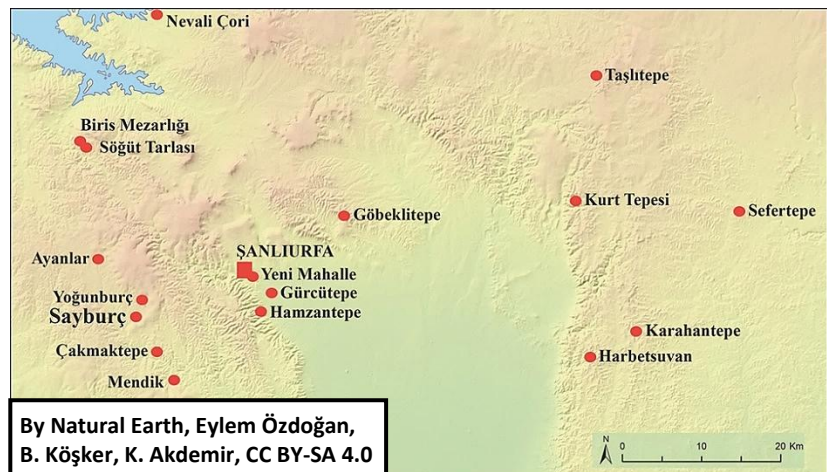
John's project work in Turkey, alongside European and Turkish academics, has focussed on trying to understand what happened in the transition into early agriculture – the effects of environments and landscapes on human activity, and the response to the effects those people had on both landscape and environment. The many archaeological sites researched are in two groups from contrasting regions, the higher hills and ridges of **Taş Tepeler** ("Stone Mounds") in south-east Turkey and the geographically lower **Konya Basin** in the southern central part of the country.

Like topography, climate changes have clearly played a huge part in the patterns of human development and land settlement over the millennia. As conditions moved from very cold to cold and then warm, lifestyles gradually changed from mobile hunter-gatherers to more sedentary, with settled communities and a more pastoral existence. This pattern happened much earlier in the Middle East than in Western Europe, from about 12,000 years ago in the pre-ceramic Neolithic (pottery didn't appear until around 7000 BC)..

TAŞ TEPELER is a group of over a dozen culturally similar settlement sites not far from the Syrian border; with a name that aptly describes the inhospitable environment of stone and impoverished soils (the scale is 20km). At **Mendik**, a pre-pottery site on a ridge, excavators have uncovered a number of relatively low structures with post holes and stone walls. These could be the oldest known human settlement remains, pre-dating Göbeklitepe. At nearby **Çakmaktepe**, a flint covered hill has revealed a large semi-circular stone building and evidence of limestone 'drift' channels that may have been used for drainage, with sediment generally between 10 and 20cm deep, suggesting long use.

Not far away, the **Sayburç** site has circular dry stone structures with T-shaped foundation stones thought to have held up a roof. These stones are typical of many of these sites, often with sculptured engravings of animals, human faces and, in some cases, geometric designs. This is remarkable given that these megaliths are more than 5,000 years older than those at Stonehenge. A 3.7m long relief of five humans surrounded by animals seems to depict a narrative scene. The central figure with two leopards is pictured here and the scene also includes a man facing an aurochs.

Probably the most famous of these sites is **Göbeklitepe**, now designated a World Heritage site. Although the site was known for centuries, it was largely ignored until recently as the stones protruding from the ground were thought to be Roman. Excavation has shown that it was first inhabited from c. 9500 BC. It is especially known for its circular structures and engraved T-shaped stone pillars, pictured below. The complex engravings, and artefacts such as stone bowls, suggest an advanced culture even in the pre-ceramic period. It lies on a rocky mountain top, as below, with no clear evidence of agricultural production, although artefacts suggesting grain processing have been found. Research suggests a historically wetter environment more conducive to cultivation on steppe grassland in the valley below.



By B. Köşker, CC BY 4.0



Top of a T-shaped pillar with ducks and boar (By Dosseman [CC-BY-SA-4.0](#))

The central excavation area (German Archaeological Institute, CC BY 4.0)



Karahantepe, to the east, similarly displays large numbers of engraved T-shaped pillars, as well as benches and a cistern-like structure. Some say that it was abandoned after an earthquake as many of the buildings were buried, but recent work suggests this may have been deliberate and that new buildings were constructed nearby. **Sefertepe**, the site furthest east, was only identified as such in the 2000s and has some exceptional discoveries, including two Neolithic human face reliefs carved into a limestone block which formed a platform, an intact 1.9 metre long pillar, a room containing human skulls placed in an orderly fashion and another with both skulls and other skeletal remains. Beads from materials not found in the region, such as the jade leopard pictured, show artistic and cultural links well beyond the area.



By Dosseman [CC-BY-SA-4.0](#)

Sanliurfa (or "Urfa") is the main town in the region, built over an early Neolithic settlement. Its museum displays many of the finds from the excavations, including 'Urfa man' shown here - a 1.8 metre tall statue of a male holding his erect phallus. Dated to c. 9000 BC, it may be the oldest naturalistic life-sized sculpture of a human, and the pose is one common to many statues and sculptures from Taş Tepeler.

Finds from all of these sites show the early transition to a more settled and sedentary lifestyle with a shared culture and community effort in construction. As well as a sophisticated stone carving tradition, there's evidence of animal husbandry such as the creation of stone 'desert kites' – structures to funnel animals into stone corrals. The current environment is clearly spartan; Neolithic soils are mostly now at the bottom of the hills, with little soil near the ancient settlements. Sampling and analysing the sediments, and creating 3D models of deposition along ancient river channels, has shown that environmental conditions in the Neolithic originally supported many more species of plants, including trees. It has also given insights into changes in human activity caused by changing precipitation, the resulting erosion and the plants that could thrive at different times.

The second area of study, the **KONYA BASIN**, lies in southern Anatolia. Similarly to Taş Tepeler, it contains a number of remarkable Neolithic pre-ceramic and ceramic sites within a comparatively small area. Most well-known is **Çatalhöyük** which developed as two tells, large mounds of the accumulation of human settlement debris, separated by an ancient watercourse. Described as possibly the first ever 'proto-city'

because of its size and urban character, it flourished around 7000 BC and was still inhabited into the Chalcolithic, or Copper Age. Around 18 successive layers of dwellings were constructed, with buildings close together and accessed through holes in the roofs. Notable finds from excavations include wall paintings (including one that has been interpreted to be a map of the layout of buildings), ceramic pottery, clay figurines (the pictured goddess-like figure with leopards or lions is particularly notable), funerary textiles, obsidian lithics and significant quantities of charred grain. The latter suggests that the community was supported by, and probably developed as a result of, successful agricultural production.



The nearby site of **Pınarbaşı Gölü** had links with Çatalhöyük, though the settlement originated much earlier, during the epipalaeolithic period between 14,000 and 11,000 BCE. Excavations revealed man-made rock shelters and graves where skulls were absent from skeletal remains. Significant numbers of marine shells and highly reworked obsidian flints suggest that it was on a major trading route. A few km away, the site at **Boncuklu Höyük** has produced finds of some of the earliest ceramics in Anatolia from c.8000 BC. Several small and oval shaped buildings have been excavated there with many postholes. In 2025 excavators at the **Can Hasan III** site (the 3rd of three tells investigated) found what is thought to be



the world's oldest street, at c. 9,750 years old. The pictured passageway between houses, contrasting with the tightly packed houses of Çatalhöyük, is thought to be as one of the earliest examples of a community experimenting with spatial planning and social organisation.

The research in the Konya Basin has considerably improved our understanding of the Neolithic environment there, and how that affected the local communities. As the name implies, the sites lie within an enclosed basin, where there would have been a lake in the post-glacial, very cold Palaeolithic period, so that most of the land was underwater.

Temperature change models were used to calculate changes in the landscape over time, charting the evolution of the lake from a large single body of water to several smaller detached ones.

The modelling showed that Pınarbaşı would have been close to the edge of a lake at the time when the settlement flourished, clearly a beneficial location. The results also contradicted a long-standing theory that Çatalhöyük was surrounded by water and swamps before and into the Neolithic. The map shows that by the aceramic Neolithic, the paleolake was 10km from Çatalhöyük, and it continued to shrink further from then.

Sediment samples then proved that the constant swamp conditions were much too early to be associated with Çatalhöyük and that there were, instead, localised wetlands. The land around the settlement could, thus, have been used for agriculture and was actually particularly conducive to cultivating wheat and barley – a situation presumably assessed by local populations in making the best use of the landscape and climate, and deciding the best places for settlement.

Phil D'Eath



New honorary EDAS member

We're very pleased to tell you that Dr Miles Russell has accepted our offer to join our illustrious band of honorary members – Richard Bradley, now Emeritus Professor at Reading University, Martin Green, a major supporter of EDAS from its early days, and Lilian Ladle for her massive contribution to our excavation work.

This is a small recognition of Miles', and Bournemouth University's, collaboration with and support for EDAS over many years. Miles has willingly given his time to share his knowledge and experience at our monthly meetings, as he is obviously doing this month, but also in providing advice and information on our past fieldwork. He has been instrumental in providing the opportunity for EDAS members to volunteer annually at the Durotriges 'Big Dig' project at Winterborne Kingston (e.g. in last month's newsletter), and for other members to visit the excavations and learn more about the results (as in this newsletter).

Thank you and welcome to Miles; long may our collaboration continue.

Phil D'Eath & Geoff Taylor



Further analysis of animal bones from Tarrant Hinton

Jodie Brunt, a PhD researcher based at Cardiff University and the Natural History Museum, London, recently visited the Museum of East Dorset to examine animal remains from the Tarrant Hinton (Barton Field) site. Jodie is studying disease in ancient/historic British animals. One of the aspects of her research is screening pathological faunal remains for pathogen DNA to improve our understanding of disease occurrence and evolution in British animals through time.

The pathology of the assemblage was initially assessed and recorded by Jennifer Wooding for her PhD thesis, some time prior to 2010. One bone from an articulated horse burial which was sampled for DNA had some initial positive results for *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* DNA.

Due to the destructive sampling techniques, requiring bone powder to be taken from the areas of pathology, permission was needed from the



Jodie taking bone powder samples at the museum.

Priest's House Museum Collections Trust to enable this research. Jodie spent two days re-sampling Iron Age animal remains that had previously been identified as having pathology potentially caused by tuberculosis. With updated lab techniques it might be possible to confirm the previous result and examine what other modern and ancient strains of tuberculosis the bacteria were most closely related to.

As well as ancient DNA sampling, radiocarbon dating will be done as the faunal assemblage is not phased. The dates of any pathogens detected can provide context to genetic analyses and determine whether any infected animals were

potentially contemporary with the human TB case at Tarrant Hinton. The skeleton of this individual, who died between 400 and 230 BC, is the earliest case of TB ever found in Britain. He can be seen in the museum's Life and Death gallery.

Vanessa Joseph



A diseased metacarpal. The cow would have been lame and been unable to put weight on the leg.

GPR at the museum

Amongst several projects like that below, here's Rob Heaton using EDAS's new GPR equipment (LMX200 Ground Penetrating Radar machine) in the garden at the Museum of East Dorset. Several possible early features are being scanned and work continues to review the results in detail, which we hope to be able to reveal in due course.

Vanessa Joseph



ERT (electrical resistivity tomography) at Lytchett Matravers Church

Robert Heaton did a Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) survey at Lytchett Matravers church a while back which proved inconclusive in looking for a possible tunnel between the church and the original manor house (Newsletter October 2025). Other information has since come to light, and Robert did a further GPR survey that suggested the possible tunnel did exist. Our members John Oswin and Gill Vickery came all the way from Bath under the auspices of the Bath and Counties Archaeological Society to do an ERT survey at the end of March. That's like the standard resistivity survey but using a line of probes rather than a machine with two probes that's moved along.

I missed Gill when I visited, but here's photos of John setting up and running one of the survey lines. This note also just missed the April newsletter, and at the time of writing I don't know the results. In any case, as with the earlier article, it's up to the church authorities and the owner of the manor site to decide what can be publicised. But we must thank John and Gill for coming from Bath to do the survey.



Geoff Taylor

EDAS 2026-27 Programme

Apologies that, while bookings for the programme for our next season are well advanced, circumstances have meant that we've not quite managed to fill all the 'slots' yet. So, I'm afraid that the usual programme leaflet won't be available at the May meeting.

I will send everyone a full summary of the talks as soon as I can, and it will then be added to the website; the lectures for the rest of this year are included in the EDAS Programme at the end (the subjects are as shown but the exact titles may change).

Keepers Cottage, Stalbridge

Following the talk by Nigel Jones about fieldwork around medieval buildings in Stalbridge last December (see January newsletter), and the invitation in last month's newsletter, a few EDAS members have joined this small friendly group and have been on site assisting with the dig.

So far, many cobbled surfaces and gutters/drains as well as walls have been uncovered, together with an unusual circular feature in the SW corner of one possible building. A large quantity of medieval and post-medieval pottery has already been found, along with an enigmatic fossil, which has yet to be identified and may well require the geological history of the area to be revised. As with any excavation there seem to be more questions than answers.

Thanks to Nigel for the invitation to join the work and for permission to show the photographs below.



Ian Richardson

Weblink Highlights May 2026

Not so many Weblinks this month but, as usual, a very varied set of topics. The research led by the University of Bradford into possible images of Anne Boleyn using facial recognition technology was bound to cause controversy, especially in the art world. However, the art world is not without its weaknesses. Relying on a single person to determine the authenticity of a painting, as it does in some cases, is highly suspect. Archaeology is not the only area where highly regarded and renowned people in a particular subject disagree, and the use of new ideas and techniques should always be open to scrutiny. Even if it turns out that the first attempts need to be improved, or abandoned, progress comes from breaking new ground.

Alan Dedden

Weblinks No. 87

DNA Analysis Of Shroud Of Turin Reveals Multiple Human, Animal And Fungal Samples [nypost](#)

Essex Museum Exhibits 'Juliasaurus' [Colchester City Council](#)

Lost Medieval City Of Stolzenberg In Poland Found After 500 Years [smithsonian](#)

Study Finds Native Americans Invented Dice And Games Of Chance Over 12,000 Years Ago [Live Science](#)

Warship Sunk By Nelson At Battle Of Copenhagen Found [marineinsight.com](#)

Ancient Gold Helmet Recovered More Than A Year After Theft From Dutch Museum [BBC News](#)

Fossil 'Treasure Trove' Pushes Back Origins Of Complex Animals At Least 4 Million Years [University of Oxford](#)

Roman Villa And 2 Lost Medieval Villages Found On Wind Farm Cable Route In Norfolk [smithsonian](#)

DNA Gives Ancestry Of Medieval Man Buried In Stone Age Monument In Spain [Live Science](#)

Roman Shipwreck Cargo Found In Swiss Lake [smithsonian](#)

Shakespeare's London Lodgings Identified In New Study [King's College London](#)

1,900 Year-Old Souvenir Cup Featuring Hadrian's Wall Found In Spain [Live Science](#)

French Researcher Decodes 4,000 Year-Old Elamite Script [France 24](#)

Neanderthal Children Grew Faster Than Modern Peers [smithsonian](#)

The Real Face Of Anne Boleyn? [BBC News](#)

Council for British Archaeology, Wessex

Geoff has recently received the CBA Wessex News booklet for Spring 2026. The Dorset section is quite short and includes some information already sent to members.

There is, though, an article on 'Roman Corner' in Dorchester, where there were disused tennis courts on West Walks, Dorchester, close to the south-west corner of the Roman defences. AC Archaeology have excavated there in advance of the construction of 'affordable' homes, and basically found part of a quarry that had been used as a rubbish dump during the Roman period: "visible as layers of mixed material" from a slot across the site. As might be expected, the large assemblage of finds reflected life within the Roman town: coins, animal bones, glass, ceramic tiles, pottery sherds and various personal items (images © Dorchester Area Community Land Trust/AJ Archaeology).



There's also an article in the Industrial Archaeology section about a turnpike milestone that was unknown until last September. This hard limestone sign had lain face down in a paddock at Cann until noticed, when its shape and weathered lettering along the side suggested its function, which was confirmed when, with some difficulty, it was turned over. The well-preserved lettering reads:

IV Miles from Shaston XI to Sherborne 1756

It would have been erected by the Shaftesbury & Sherborne Trust alongside what is now the A30, but was replaced by a cast iron milepost in the 19th century. Why it was saved and moved 5 miles away remains a mystery.

The CBA Wessex May Newsletter can be found on their website [here](#), with the usual mix of lectures and events around the region. This month's is more extensive than usual, and includes excavation visits and possible volunteering opportunities (although some distance away).

Poole Maritime Trust

As I've mentioned before, we receive Poole Maritime Trust's newsletters and I aim to pass on items of potential interest to you. For those with a particular maritime interest, you can obtain your own copy by emailing secretary@poolemaritimetrust.org.

You can also visit them if you want to research our maritime and Poole port history:

Poole Maritime Trust, First Floor Canford Cliffs Library, 6 Western Road BH13 7BN

They're open each Thursday morning from 10.00 - 12.00

And the first Saturday of each month: 6th June, 4th July, 1st August ...

And if you have anything maritime or port related that you'd like to pass on, they'd be pleased to accept it: images, ephemera, artefacts, etc. – contact the secretary as above.

Viking funerals and burials 1

This article is based directly on a paper by Neil Price in a 2010 edition of *Medieval Archaeology*, a report on the 2008 annual lecture to the Society for Medieval Archaeology (reference at the end). Thanks to Neil for his permission to summarise it and to show the sepia-tinted grave reconstructions. The paper looks at Viking period burials and the funeral practices and ritual that preceded them, developing a view that funerary rites often relate directly to Norse mythology and poetry (Norse is meant generally for all Vikings, not just those from Norway), and more generally that they essentially tell a story.

The paper chose a number of examples from the thousands of known burial monuments across Scandinavia and the Viking diaspora, i.e. the places beyond Scandinavia where Vikings traded and settled. I've stayed with those, although research now may reveal further burials that have been excavated since it was written to add to the arguments. Similarly, in the time since the paper was first written, further examination of finds may have brought new knowledge, such as from aDNA (which would certainly help in understanding the people!).

A 1992 article in another journal said that the Sutton Hoo burial's curious range of artefacts isn't a reference to real life but a "heroic text"; in effect a poem like *Beowulf*, with all the same problems of interpretation. Neil thinks that Viking funerary/burial rites may show the same 'poetry' – theatrical performances of important stories.



Sutton Hoo 'sword pyramid',
to attach belt to scabbard.

Like at Sutton Hoo earlier, it is the boat burials that are the most famous of Viking funerary practices, although there are many variations. What appear to be dugout canoes have been found, and vessel sizes range from one-person rowing boats to large ocean-going ships. Maritime references are also seen in graves shaped like boats, sometimes with stone benches inside, or cremations in and around stones set in a ship shape, which are actually known from as

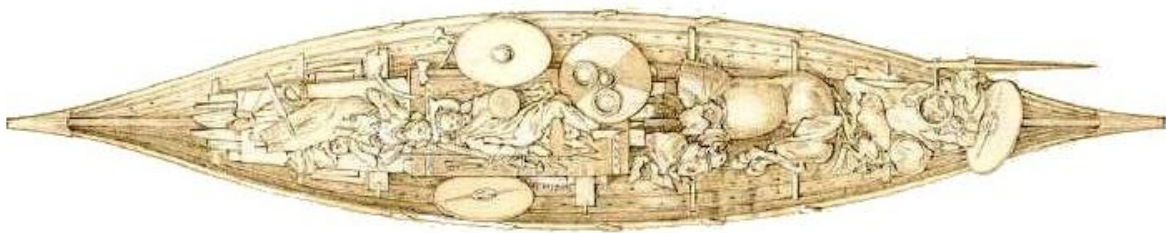


Blomsholm stone ship setting, Sweden, 40m long

early as 1000 BC. To try to categorise burial practices more generally would start with a long list, with variations over time and place: cremation or inhumation, ground left level with or without markers or settings, burial under mounds of different sizes – singly or in groups which (as pictured below) can be very large – and so on.

One attempt in the 1990s looked in detail at all the known Viking burials in the south Baltic region, which served to show that funerary rites were truly individual, even within a single community, e.g. at its most specific some people might be buried with a pot to the right of the head while for others nearby it was to the left. We might consider the category of ‘ship burials’, and be able to categorise by similarities, but each is unique in its details. Neil’s paper aims for a model to start to explain the patterning, something that is speculative but can be linked to what is known from excavated graves.

Skíringssalr, known today as Kaupang, is about 100km south-west of Oslo. The complex ship burial



Early 10th century ship burial in Bikjholberget cemetery at Kaupang, Norway (drawing by Þórhallur Þráins).

shown was first excavated in the 1950s, but needed further work over 40 years later to disentangle what was actually found. This 8.5m long ship was placed accurately over the grave of a man buried a few decades earlier, with four people inside, several animals and many objects. An expensively dressed woman aged 45-50 rested in the prow (left above), with several items of jewellery and a baby at her hip. Head-to-head with her was a man of unknown age, spatially (not necessarily personally) associated with three shields and many weapons, including axes (one then antique), spear, knives, a sword and quiver of arrows. Amidships, a horse had been killed and a well-dressed woman, probably the eldest on the boat, was in the stern, apparently sitting up and probably holding the steering oar.

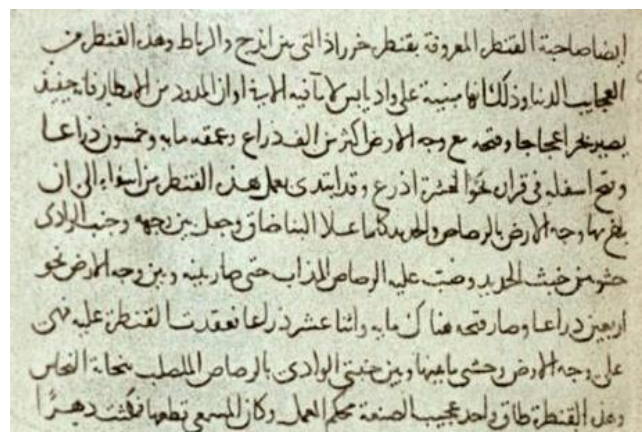
There were many other artefacts in the boat, including two whetstones, an iron staff and an imported bronze bowl scratched with runes.

The woman in the stern had a shield behind her. Most organic material



had decayed, but other remains suggest many further items, and there were the remains of a dog and teeth suggesting further animals. Interestingly, iron staffs are known elsewhere and connected to the *völur*, a female magic worker or sorceress featuring in Old Norse poetry and prose. Clearly, it would be valuable to know of the relationships, if any, between the people buried here.

Perhaps surprisingly, we have an account of Viking funerals from around 921 AD by Ibn Fadlan, an Arab chronicler. He was sent by the Caliph of Baghdad with an embassy to the King of the Bulgars of the Middle Volga, for which he wrote his lengthy *Risala*, or report. It includes what he saw for those of low status: a poor person is cremated in a small boat built by his fellows, a slave is left for the animals and a thief’s body is hung on a tree and left there. He provides a long account of the mortuary practices following the death of a Viking chieftain, probably somewhere north of Samara in south-western Russia.



There are debates as to the accuracy of some of Ibn Fadlan's descriptions, not least as to whether the *Rus* (or *al-Rusiyyah*) were actually Vikings/of Scandinavian descent, though most think they were. His description of them as tall, blond or red-haired and of pale complexion is the ultimate cliché of Nordic appearance. In any case, what he describes is a 10-day funeral, with the body buried in a newly built timber building during preparations, which included making new clothes for him costing a third of his wealth. He was set within his own ship, that had been brought onshore, propped up by cushions and accompanied by his weapons, food and drink. At least seven animals were killed and placed in the ship, as was a slave girl. The account says that she was a volunteer, who had 10 days of pleasure before dying, including a great deal of sex and drinking a large amount of intoxicating liquor, both the case for everyone involved in the funeral. The boat was then set alight and a mound later built over it.



Over 900 Viking and earlier burial mounds are known in Vang, 310km north of Oslo.

There are parallels in Nordic poetry and sagas for slaves to be killed to serve their master in the afterlife. The funeral pyre is also a common subject, intending to take the soul quickly to Valhalla, as Ibn Fadlan was told. The killing of animals, often in a ritualised way, is a common feature of excavated ship burials. For example, the famous Oseberg ship in Oslo's 'Viking Ship Museum', pictured below, had a heap of at least 10 decapitated horses and three decapitated dogs on the foredeck, with three more horses and an ox by the prow. Its pristine state in the museum belies what it must have looked like before being buried, and it seems that violent spectacle was part of the funerary experience, confirmed in at least two other contemporary sources where people were also killed and "abundant alcohol" consumed.

The Oseberg Ship, 21.6m long, was buried around 835 AD about 75km south of Oslo and excavated in 1904. Apart from a vast array of goods, it contained two women, one probably around 80 and the other now believed to be in her early 50s. Re-examination of the dig diaries showed that the original investigators almost all believed that the ship had originally been only half covered by the mound. The prow and foredeck remained open as far back as the tent-like burial chamber, which stayed accessible for months, perhaps even a year or two. Once it was decided to close the chamber, there are signs of considerable haste, with odd pieces of wood used, nails bent and broken, and no attempt at neatness. The mound of objects in front of the chamber was, similarly, created rapidly – heavy objects smashing some of the fine items beneath.



The Oseberg Ship in the old museum before its recent move to the new one.

Other Viking graves have been suggested as being left open for some time, as have Sutton Hoo mounds 1 and 2. We might think of it as a 'stage' for the ongoing telling of the funeral story. There are other Viking burial practices that seem to tell tales, notably parts of the story of Sigurðr, slayer of the dragon Fafnir, on Swedish rune stones and Manx crosses.



Carving of runes with scenes of parts of the legend of Sigurðr on a rock in Ramsund, Sweden.

The picture stones of Gotland, a Swedish island south of Stockholm, are memorials to the dead, of which the Viking ones usually show a ship under sail in the bottom part surrounded by various small scenes, but are otherwise uninscribed until the explosion in rune carving towards the end of the Viking Age. They seem to be the equivalent of ship burials, of which Gotland has none. Elements of Norse sagas can be seen on some and one 'set', working around a property boundary with each stone referencing the next one, set up later, clearly relates to the Sigurðr saga.

Picture stone Ardre VIII, 2.2m tall. It has various mythological scenes, including Wayland the Smith, Thor fishing, Loki's punishment and Odin riding to Valhalla (Historiska Museet, Stockholm).



The second article summarised from Neil's paper will look at a few more Viking burials which add to the idea that Viking funeral and mortuary practices might be seen as telling a story, probably one that was relevant to the deceased and those involved.

Price, N. 2010. Passing into Poetry: Viking-Age Mortuary Drama and the Origins of Norse Mythology. *Medieval Archaeology* 54:1, pp. 123-156.

Geoff Taylor

View from Above 79: Strip lynchets

The origin/reason for strip lynchets, like those in the photographs, may not be obvious to many people. They are somewhat reminiscent of Mediterranean, or even oriental, cultivation terraces. In fact, they have been created gradually over a long period by contour ploughing – an approach to cultivation that is better suited to fairly steep hillsides than the ridge and furrow technique generally used when the lynchets began to form. In other words, strip lynchets are normally of medieval origin, even if sometimes said to be prehistoric. Relative dating may be clearer when the lynchets cut into what are known to be earlier field systems, such as so-called Celtic fields.



Strip lynchets at Uploders, north-east of Bridport (SASY Images).

The need to cultivate such difficult ground does suggest times of population pressure. Since the Great Plague brought its own terrible solution to medieval population problems, strip lynchets are unlikely to have been ploughed beyond 1348.

Looking at the *Dorset Explorer* website 'Monuments' layer shows a large number of lynchets around Uploders. None are scheduled, but they are within the Lodgers and Uploders Conservation Area, designated as such because of (*inter alia*) its landscape setting, rich archaeological heritage (e.g. Bronze and Iron Age earthworks and field systems), with the presence of many strip lynchets strongly featured.



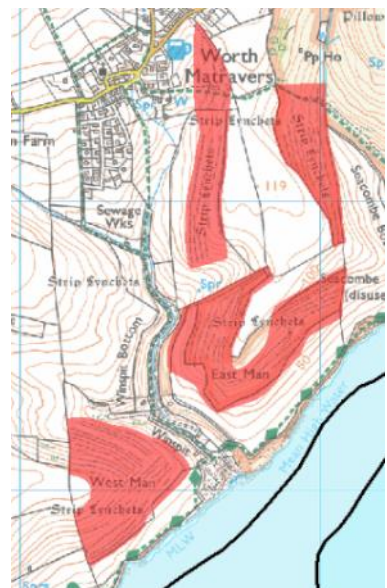
Strip lynchets at Worth Matravers (photo credit Sandy Gerrard)

Most of the Worth Matravers strip lynchets are in the steep-sided valleys to the south of the village – Winspit Bottom and Seacombe Bottom – and along the coastal strip in that area. These are scheduled monuments, grouped in four areas, there called East and West Man.

These are scheduled because of their excellent state of preservation; although the 1840 Tithe Map shows these areas were still arable then, presumably they weren't ploughed (or were even contour ploughed?). The schedule describes the terraces as 'treads' and the scarps as 'risers'. They clearly vary quite a lot, presumably because of the different slopes – 70m to 360m in length, 3m to 28m in width and about 2m to 4.5m in height.

The Worth Matravers strip lynchets are one of largest surviving groups in Dorset, covering about 40ha, which was a large proportion of the open field system associated with the medieval manor in the village.

Geoff Taylor



EDAS PROGRAMME

Unless stated lectures are at 7:30pm at St Catherine's Church Hall, Lewens Lane, Wimborne, BH21 1LE.
The hall won't be open before 7pm.

Wed 13th May	Lecture	Miles Russell	Pitdown Man: adventures in archaeological forgery
Wed 9th September	Lecture	Cindy Wood	Medieval women and how to find them
Wed 14th October	Lecture	tbd (Cotswold Archaeology)	Excavations at Fordingbridge
Wed 11th November	Lecture	Phil Trim	Fieldwork at Arne Moors
Wed 9th December	Lecture	Luke Mourland	Dorset Workhouses

DISTRICT DIARY

DNHAS meetings aren't included here unless I'm notified – please check their website.

Wed 20th May	Wareham Society	Andrea Frankham-Hughes	Through the mists: Exploring the hidden prehistoric archaeology of the Isle of Portland.
Thur 21st May	AVAS	Speaker tbd	AGM followed by talk
Sat 23rd May	BNSS	Denise Allen	Glass in Ancient Britain (In-house & Zoom)
Thur 28th May	Blandford Group	Clare Randall	Barrows and burials: two prehistoric sites in Wiltshire (changed from previously)
Tues 9th June	BNSS	Bryan Popple	Finding History: Archaeological and other finds (Zoom only)
Wed 17th June	Wareham Society	Paul Cheetham	Drowning in Dorset. The rise and decline of the water meadow systems in Dorset.

Archaeology Societies

- **Avon Valley Archaeological Society:** <http://www.avas.org.uk/>
Meetings at Ibsley Village Hall, BH24 3NL (<https://ibsleyhall.co.uk/>), 7:30pm 3rd Thursday of month except June, July & August. Visitors £3.50 CASH; membership £10 pa.
- **Blandford Museum Archaeology Group:**
<https://blandfordtownmuseum.org.uk/blandford-museum-archaeology-group/>
Meetings normally 7:30pm 4th Thursday of each month September to May at the Woodhouse Gardens Pavilion, The Tabernacle, DT11 7GQ. Visitors £3; membership £10 pa.
- **Bournemouth Natural Sciences Society:** <http://bnss.org.uk>
Events at 39 Christchurch Road, Bournemouth BN1 3NS; lectures Tuesday 7:30pm/Saturday 2:30pm. In-house archaeology talks are, as far as I can tell, free for non-members (donations appreciated). There are also some Zoom presentations, particularly aimed at members, though non-members can email bnssmembership@gmail.com to see whether they can send you a 'link' for the talk.
- **Dorset Natural History & Archaeology Society:** <https://www.dorsetmuseum.org/whats-on/>
Events in Dorchester, usually ticketed and charged unless you're a DNHAS member.
- **Wareham and District Archaeology & Local History Society:** <https://wareham-archaeology.com/>
Meetings at Furzebrook Village Hall, BH20 5AR, normally 7:30pm 3rd Wednesday of each month except July & August. Visitors welcome for £5; membership £15 pa.