East Dorset Antiquarian Society

Charity No: 1171828

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Founded 1983

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NEWSLETTER – February 2023

As you might expect, Julian Richards drew a good audience for his excellent January talk, summarised here thanks to Alan as the **The last wild Britons – the Mesolithic people at Springhead**.

The next lecture will be at 7:30, Wednesday 8th February, by EDAS member Neil Meldrum on 'Ancient China' - Chinese culture in its earliest phase from about 2000 BCE down to 221 BCE, when the first true Emperor of China emerged.

**But the most important item in this newsletter is
the letter from our Chairman on the next page.**

Alan has, for the 54th time, provided his usual **Weblinks** and **Highlights,** which also gave me a link to the following article. I'm sure many of you will know about **Eyam 'plague village'** which isolated itself to avoid spreading the plague in 1665-6, but a visit to the Peak District made me think of filling out the story a bit. There is, of course, a sort-of link to Dorset, where the Black Death first entered Britain in 1348, and to the more recent events of the pandemic.

Jo Crane and Sue Newmans' aerial photographs have provided the inspiration for the 51st **View from Above: Heywood Castle**. Another, if more recent, series comes in the 7th **From the Archives**, this time looking at the Dorset Proceedings from 1886.

Vanessa has sent news of a prestigious award won by the Museum of East Dorset, and I've added in an item that was originally written when we had Bulletins during the lockdowns: **A couple of the many Dorset ghost stories**. Perhaps that's not entirely appropriate for the newsletter, though it is 'historical', but I didn't want to waste it and I am running short of articles – ***I need yours***!

The **EDAS Programme** and **District Diary** complete the newsletter, as usual.

I'd also add this reminder: EDAS is 40 this year and we're celebrating with an evening garden party at the Museum of East Dorset, Saturday 20th May 6:00-8:30. More details to follow in the next few weeks.

Very sadly, just as I was putting this newsletter together, I learnt that Tim Schadla-Hall passed away a few weeks ago. Tim was one of our founders, an Honorary Member and good friend to the society over the years. He had been ill for quite a while but often found the time to write about the newsletter and will be much missed.

Geoff Taylor

Dear Members,

Next March will mark the end of my second five-year term as chairman of EDAS, and I have decided not to reapply for the position. There are several reasons, but I think it is time to hand over to somebody else, before time takes its toll. I would like to remain actively involved in the society and will apply to remain a committee member.

Going back to the beginning, I had no intention or interest in taking on the responsibility but I was asked to stand by the previous chair, John Day. John was somebody I really liked and respected and I found it difficult to say no to. First he asked me to take on the newsletter, then asked me to join the committee, followed by asking me to organise a field trip, which resulted in the Pembrokeshire trip of 2011. It was on the field trip that he broached the subject of chair. John had a great sense of humour and I thought he was joking, as did most of the committee when I raised my hand at the pre-AGM meeting in 2013.

Since joining the society in 2007 I have been extremely fortunate to participate in two ground breaking archaeological excavations, at Worth Matravers and Druce Farm. I thank Phil Roberts for introducing me to field archaeology and, obviously, Lilian for giving me what seemed like full-time employment. These were great fun, with great people, offering so many wonderful experiences in the snow, the rain, in sweltering heat and in cold dusty barns. Happy days.

I am delighted that the society has remained successful and even grown in numbers over the last ten years, with a healthy turnover of members. We have continued to deliver our four main activities: practical archaeology; monthly lecture programme, one-off day events; and annual field trips. I fully acknowledge the effort of all committee members, past and current for making the society so successful: they share a common enthusiasm and commitment to the society. I particularly thank Peter and Geoff who look after the key administrative tasks. I also thank all members who help us achieve our objective to promote an interest in the archaeological heritage and local history of Dorset and the local area. It has been a privilege to be chair of this important local society and I look forward to enjoying future activities.

In the immediate future I have to help complete several outstanding tasks for EDAS, not least to archive the Druce Farm Roman Villa project; publish the Druce Farm Neolithic Project; support Christopher Sparey-Green to publish the long-awaited Myncen Farm Roman Villa Report; encourage Robert Lancaster to publish the Wareham Pipe Kiln Report; and finish the All Hallows Churchyard excavation report.

Best wishes and thank you,
Andrew Morgan
Chairman (2013–2023)

It is very sad to lose Andrew as Chairman, but good that he'll stay on the committee and continue to provide his knowledge and insights. I trust that I speak for everyone when I say that EDAS wouldn't have done what it has, or be where it is today, without him.

Andrew has certainly put in a long stint and deserves a break. That does mean that, if EDAS is to survive and continue to thrive, we need someone to step up and take on this position – to steer us through the next few years. Could that be you? The AGM is on the 8th of March, with papers to be issued in a few weeks; your nominations are needed.

The last wild Britons – the Mesolithic people at Springhead
Lecture by Julian Richards

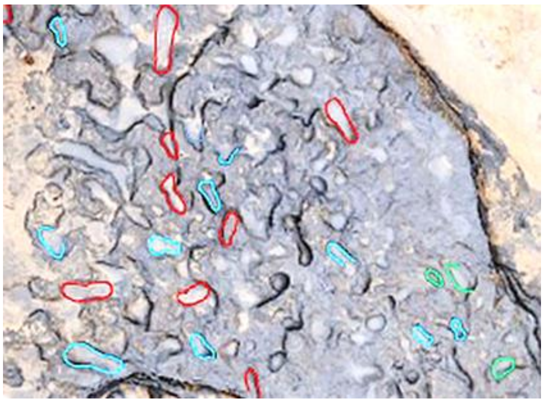
There are many long-held beliefs about the hunter-gatherer times, and peoples, that have come under increasing scrutiny following recent excavations so, to set the scene for the project at Springhead, Julian addressed many of these in his talk. Britain is blessed with a wide variety of countryside that is very beautiful and has very low population levels, but are they wild? Farmed landscapes are very evidently not wild, but are often classified as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty – AONBs, but if they are not wild, how natural are they? There are also areas where farming is either absent or has not obviously impacted the landscape. These are typically upland areas such as the Peak District or Dartmoor, and they have a more natural or untamed appearance. However, in all these areas there is evidence of earlier human activity, including farming, which will inevitably have altered the landscape, very often to a far greater degree than is suggested by the above ground relics of early human presence.

Cranborne Chase AONB from Pimperne Long Barrow, but how much is natural?

The ease with which such landscapes can be misunderstood was brought home to me two days after Julian's talk, when listening to the Radio 4 'Today' programme and an item about wild camping during which a contributor described Dartmoor as "the last true wilderness (in Britain)". Wild as most of Dartmoor may appear, there are plenty of sites showing evidence of earlier humans occupying and changing the landscape. It is also worth asking how wild a landscape can be when most of the natural animal population has been long removed either by hunting or as a result of the changes made by humans.

Merrivale Stone Row on Dartmoor

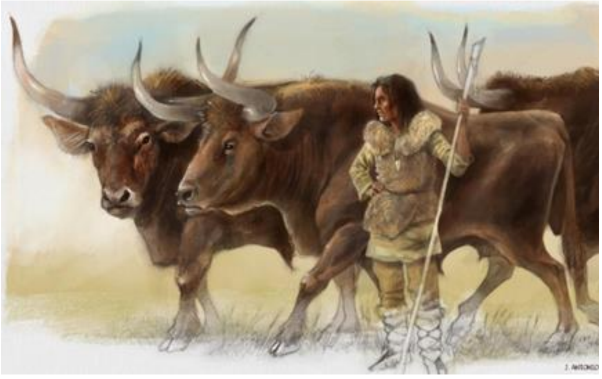
Most of the visible remains on Dartmoor go back no further than the start of the Neolithic (*c*. 4000BC). Evidence of earlier humans is, by its nature, very ephemeral and often consists of footprints in the sand, such as the 950,000 year old ones at Happisburgh, which disappear with the next tide. Otherwise, the remains are almost entirely of stone tools and flakes, and occasionally bones. Everything else was organic, such as wood, which does not usually survive. Yet this period constitutes the longest time span of human activity in Britain, from around 1 million years ago to the end of the last Ice Age at around 9,000 BC, and is known as the Palaeolithic era. These early humans roaming Britain during the Palaeolithic weren't *Homo sapiens* but related ancestors such as *Homo heidelbergensis* as at Boxgrove or, it is thought, *Homo antecessor* at Happisburgh. During this time there were many geological phases which sculpted much of the landscape we know today, but there was an important addition in that Britain was joined to Europe along much of its eastern flank. Recent work by Vince Gaffney has shown that this 'land bridge' was eroded over the millennia as the sea levels rose. It was then massively impacted around 6,150 BC by a tsunami triggered by a sub-sea landslide off the Norwegian coast called the 'Storegga Slide', leaving a narrow 'bridge' and a few islands. Then, rising sea levels caused by the post-Ice Age warming climate finally separated Britain from mainland Europe and swamped the remaining islands.



Clues to humans changing the landscape start in the Mesolithic, after the last Ice Age, with large areas of burning in forest areas. Some of these could be natural, but the scale and distribution suggest human activity. It is thought that this was to create the environment for more edible flora, either for the humans or to attract animals to be killed for food, bones for tools and skins for clothing. This methodology suggests that, at the very least, these hunter-gatherers regularly returned to the site, perhaps seasonally, but certainly over periods of years. Hence, they were not aimlessly roaming in search of the next animal gathering ground, which indicates a degree of sophistication and forward planning not normally associated with hunter-gatherers.

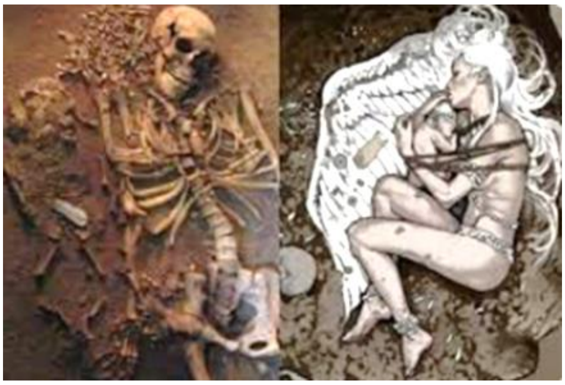
In some areas there would have been abundant natural resources to sustain the local Mesolithic group, giving them little incentive to wander in search of new hunting grounds. Such sites would inevitably be next to, or very close to, a water source, such as the early Mesolithic site at Star Carr in North Yorkshire. Perhaps some marginal sites were made more supportive of longer term habitation by forest burning. Another side to their character is perhaps revealed by a stone hand-axe now in Reading Museum. It is far too large to be useable, and could have been an 'exhibition' piece like the excessively tanged arrowhead found at Marden Henge and now in Devizes Museum. Or perhaps there was an element of humour on the part of the knapper (look what I made!).

During the last Ice Age, a sheet of ice over a kilometre thick in many places covered much of Britain. The combination of the scouring of the underlying ground surface and huge water flows southwards as this melted created a 'clean' landscape devoid of flora or fauna except in a few isolated areas. Throughout the Mesolithic this changed as the first pioneering species populated the barren landscape, thus allowing other species of both flora and fauna to then establish. The evolving flora and fauna occurred rapidly at the start of the Mesolithic, and then more slowly as a long term balance was approached. The animals inhabiting Britain migrated from the continent and included wolves, bears, beavers and aurochs (as pictured). All of these (and others) were hunted to extinction, resulting in changes to the environment. Aurochs went extinct at around 1,400 BC, bear survived to Saxon times, beavers to the 16th century and wolves probably to the 18th century in Britain.



Evidence of Mesolithic houses is rare. The people were thought to always be on the move using makeshift temporary shelters constructed with whatever was available but, as discussed, this was not always the case. Studies in the Kennett Valley and elsewhere have shown that Mesolithic occupation concentrated in the valleys, but by the Neolithic it had moved on to the hills. DNA analysis has concluded (albeit on small sample sizes) that the Neolithic culture was brought in by human migration from the continent, and this brought with it very different ceremonial practices. The Mesolithic peoples were very light on the landscape, only leaving traces of practices essential to their hunter-gatherer lifestyle. The early Neolithic peoples, by contrast, built long barrows, causewayed enclosures and cursus monuments – all of which required a significant amount of effort, probably involving several local 'groups', and coordination, but which were more ceremonial than practical.

The small sample sizes available for DNA analysis results from the rarity of Mesolithic and Neolithic burials. Mesolithic burials that have been found across Britain were simple with very few, if any, grave goods, in contrast to burials on the continent where more elaboration was the norm, exemplified by the 'swan's wing' burial of a baby and juvenile woman at Vedbaek, Denmark. The cemetery there contained a number of burials with grave goods, and the swan's wing burial included the flint blade visible in the picture.

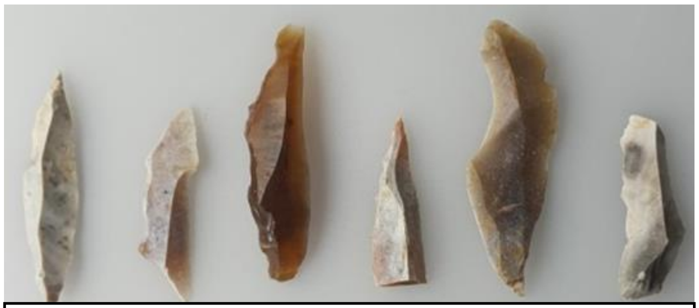


Other sites in Britain tell stories not following the usual view, such as Howick, Northumbria. Here the initial assessment of finds indicated a late Bronze or early Iron Age occupation including a round house, as shown in the reconstruction. However, radiocarbon dating of hazelnut charcoal puts the site at around 7,800 BC. Analysis also showed that the site had been occupied for up to 100 years, reinforcing the view that not all Mesolithic peoples were nomadic if the local conditions supported a more settled existence.

The excavations by David Jacques at Blick Mead, just by the A303 east of Stonehenge, were the subject of an EDAS talk in Sept 2018 (see the October 2018 newsletter). They also revealed evidence of long term use in the Mesolithic, though it has not been established if the use was seasonal or more permanent. However, the use of Blick Mead spanned most of the Mesolithic era.

The excavations by Julian in 1980-81 at the 'Coneybury Anomaly', closer to Stonehenge than Blick Mead, found remnants of a feast dating from the early Neolithic period. Post-excavation analysis revealed that several groups had participated in the feasting, with most being Neolithic but one group being Mesolithic. This evidence of mixing of Mesolithic and Neolithic peoples is very rare, if not unique, and is supported by other DNA studies showing very little Mesolithic DNA in later populations.

The Springhead project led by Julian was triggered by a local collection of Mesolithic flints coming to his attention. The information on these flints said that they were found at a couple of sites along the valley below Springhead, near Shaftesbury. Although the spring is now about 200m above the old mill buildings, it would have been lower down the valley in the Mesolithic era, slowly eroding its way up the valley over the millennia. Work started in the field below the old mill used for car parking, with a geophysical survey and Mike Allen taking core samples which revealed a Mesolithic surface between 1 and 2 metres below the ground. Following this, a series of test pits were dug by volunteers, then more test pits were opened up in the kitchen garden, in the formal garden close to the spring, in the grounds of 'Greensands' chalet bungalow down the valley and in the orchard over the road from the old mill. One test pit in a raised bed close to the stream (Collyer's Brook) in the kitchen garden found the remains of a chalk brick structure, but work had to be curtailed when the water level was reached! Mesolithic flints were found in all the test pits, including some microliths, but other items were also found of varying eras. Although the valley is starting to reveal its past, the results so far have not identified a focus for the Mesolithic activity that undoubtedly took place there.



Mesolithic microliths with different patinas (not from Springhead)

The Mesolithic flints found have a different patina from those in the collection – white rather than the ochreous patina of the recent finds. This results from the geology in which they lay for 6,000 years or more, so this difference suggests that the flints in the collection did not actually come from this valley.

The project will, with the support of Springhead Trust, continue with a focus in the field alongside the church down in the village. Julian believes this is a likely site for a Saxon settlement and the work there will involve local schoolchildren, as he has done with past projects such as 'What's under your school?' and the involvement of several hundred schoolchildren in the 'SAVED' project at Shaftesbury Abbey (see May 2021 newsletter for his EDAS talk on this). Meanwhile, the search for the centre of Mesolithic activity in the valley will resume later this year.

Alan Dedden

Weblink Highlights January 2023

Another month with fewer than normal weblinks, but 'Live Science' has several more items on subjects such as how the Black Death spread, 'pigeon towers' found at Luxor and a 52ft long 'book of the dead' found at Saqqara – just go to the site and use the 'Search' function [which led me to the link mentioned in the Eyam article below – ed.]

There have been a number of news stories about repatriated artefacts over the last years; another crops up this month, but this one serves to remind us that looting was not limited to earlier centuries – it still goes on today.

I have included weblinks on the Tudor ship found at a quarry in Kent and the possible first civil war site at Coleshill, Birmingham, both excavated by Wessex Archaeology and featured on 'Digging for Britain'. However, I do wonder how short of stories they must be to take pieces from TV programmes when the events featured were months ago.

Alan Dedden

January 2023 Weblinks: No. 54

Ancient Egyptian 'Green Coffin' Returned To Cairo By US
Ancient Egyptian 'Green Coffin' returned to Cairo by US - BBC News

Massive Viking Hall Unearthed In Denmark
Massive Viking hall unearthed in biggest find in a decade - and this may only be the start | Science | News | Express.co.uk

Quarry Workers Make Unexpected Discovery Of Tudor Ship
Quarry workers make 'unexpected' discovery of ship from Queen Elizabeth I's reign | Live Science

Lidar Reveals Massive Maya Site Beneath Guatemalan Rainforest
Lasers reveal massive, 650-square-mile Maya site hidden beneath Guatemalan rainforest | Live Science

New DNA Study Finds Previously Unknown Siberian Hunter-Gatherer Population Mysteriously Vanished
Prehistoric population once lived in Siberia, but mysteriously vanished, genetic study finds | Live Science

Rare, 'High-Status' Viking Burial Unearthed In Oslo Garden
Rare, 'high-status' Viking burial unearthed in a garden in Oslo | Live Science

Newport Ship Is 'World's Largest 3D Puzzle'
Newport Ship: Medieval vessel is 'world's largest 3D puzzle' - BBC News

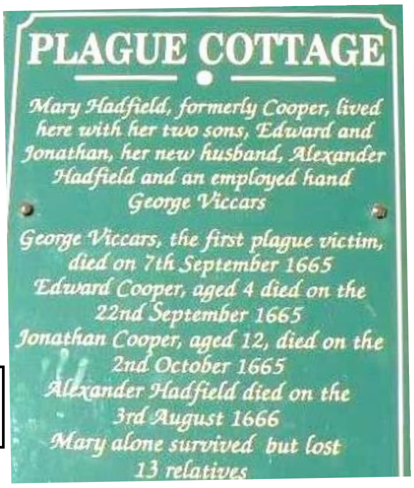
Natural England Mapping Ancient Holloways Starting In Dorset
Project to map Dorset's ancient sunken holloways - BBC News also
Hidden ancient trenches known as holloways which crisscross Britain's countryside | Daily Mail Online

Unexpected Find Of Civil War Battle Site
Archaeologists 'amazed' at 'unexpected' 380 year old English Civil War battle site | Science | News | Express.co.uk

The CBA Wessex February newsletter is HERE

Eyam 'plague village'

In the late summer of 1665 a parcel of cloth was sent from London to the village tailor in Eyam (pronounced 'eem'), 10 miles east of Buxton in the Peak District National Park. That started the village's story of tragedy and courage, for the cloth was infested with fleas carrying *Yersinia pestis*, the bacterium that causes bubonic plague. The tailor's assistant, George Viccars, spread the cloth to air, inadvertently releasing the fleas to bite him and, presumably, others. Within a week, apparently on September 5th, he was dead, the first victim in the village.



PLAGUE COTTAGE

Mary Hadfield, formerly Cooper, lived here with her two sons, Edward and Jonathan, her new husband, Alexander Hadfield and an employed hand George Viccars

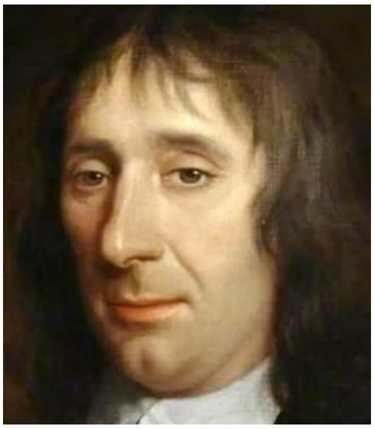
George Viccars, the first plague victim, died on 7th September 1665
Edward Cooper, aged 4 died on the 22nd September 1665
Jonathan Cooper, aged 12, died on the 2nd October 1665
Alexander Hadfield died on the 3rd August 1666
Mary alone survived but lost 13 relatives

Many houses in Eyam have signs like this recording the sad stories of those living there. The dates are from the Parish Register; sometimes burial dates?

In London, the first cases had appeared in the spring, and it was soon clear that this was a major epidemic. The King fled to the country along with the rich and, indeed, anyone who had a place to go. Deaths rose through the summer months, peaking at 7,165 during one week in September, just when the contagion was starting its slow spread in Eyam. The main measure to contain the epidemic in London was to quarantine people in their homes at the first sign of a case in the household, clearly disadvantaging the poor in their cramped dwellings, and probably condemning everyone in the building. The Lords didn't even meet to discuss the crisis until 1666 and, instead of relief and aid, decided that the quarantine regulations wouldn't apply to people of note, nor would plague hospitals be sited near the homes of the nobility.

Eyam was, of course, much later than London to feel the effects of the plague. There were just 6 deaths in September 1665, but that jumped to 23 in October. Then, no doubt due to the cold weather, they fell to 7 in November and stayed relatively low until June of 1666. In fact, there were only 4 deaths in May though, as with all of these figures, it's not clear that all the recorded deaths were due to the plague.

I've not discovered what approach was taken over the winter, although it does seem that home quarantine may not have been imposed. Certainly burials continued in the graveyard and I've found no evidence of plague pits. By the spring, when the difficulties of travel from this upland area were reducing, some people were apparently preparing to flee.



The Church still held considerable power and authority, with most of the villagers still looking to the leadership of the previous minister, Thomas Stanley. A Puritan, he had been dismissed from his post for refusing to take the Oath of Conformity and use the Common Book of Prayer, and lived in exile at the edge of the village. His replacement was Reverend William Mompesson (pictured), then 28, who lived in the rectory with his wife Catherine and their two small children. Appointed in April 1664, he remained unpopular with the majority of the people, who retained Puritan sympathies.

He managed to enlist Stanley's help, and together they persuaded the people not to leave, despite considerable misgivings. Mompesson promised to stay and do all he could to alleviate suffering; he was willing to risk death rather than spread the disease. Measures were introduced to reduce infection within the village. Church services were to be held outdoors in the natural amphitheatre of Cucklet Delf, a 10 minute walk from the centre of the village and overlooked by a natural limestone 'pulpit'. Each family or household was to keep apart from others; we would clearly recognise

this as ‘social distancing’. The villagers were also to bury their own dead, not in the churchyard but as close to their houses as reasonably possible.

Signs were placed along a *cordon sanitaire* around the village warning people not to approach, with boundary stones also marking the edge of the village; they are all at least a 15 minute walk from the houses. Some of the stones had holes made in them, filled with vinegar in which coins for payment of supplies could be disinfected. Some sites say that water was also used in some cases, and one of the boundary markers was an enclosed spring, now known as Mompesson’s Well. A great deal of support came from the Earl of Devonshire in providing the necessities of life, but many less wealthy neighbours helped to ensure the villagers could survive their isolation.

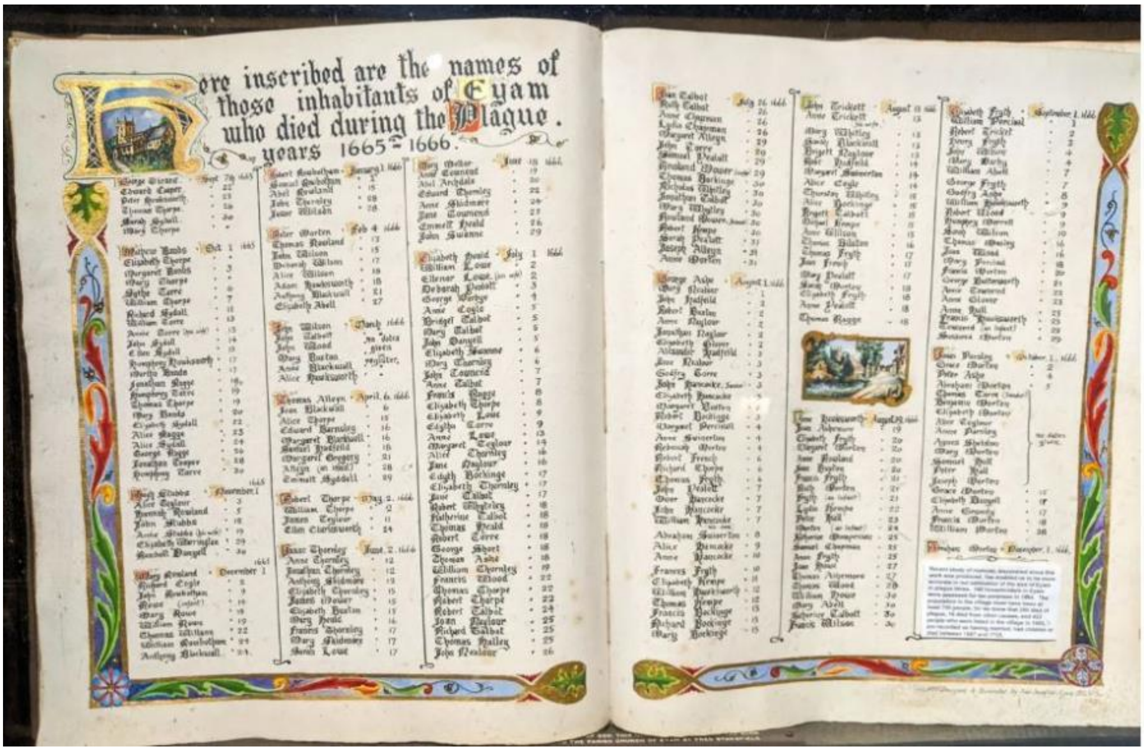
It is said that few, if any, villagers attempted to leave, despite the huge numbers of deaths from June onwards, rising to a peak of 77 in August. After that numbers fell, with Abraham Morten the last to succumb on 1st November. Survival appeared random and several survived despite their close contact with sufferers. For example, poor Elizabeth Hancock survived despite burying her six children and her husband in eight days; their burial place (pictured) is known as the Riley Graves from the name of their farm. Marshall Howe became the unofficial gravedigger where the remaining family, if any, couldn’t do the job. He apparently contracted the plague but survived, although his wife and one of his children sadly did not. Both Thomas Stanley and Rev. Mompesson also survived, despite their relatively close and frequent contact with sufferers. Sadly, William Mompesson lost his wife in August, though his children survived.

Several articles talk of some villagers having genes which gave a level of immunity to the plague, for example “Interestingly some of the villagers who were in contact with those who caught the plague, did not catch it. This was because they had a chromosome which gave them protection. This same chromosome has been shown to still exist in those who are direct descendants of those who survived the plague, and who are still living in the village”. There does seem to be good research to back this up, and see also this article on the Live Science website.

Tomb of
CATHERINE MOMPESSON,
who died in the plague
AUG 25th 1666

Catherine Mompesson’s tomb is not far from the church door, presumably one of the closest places to the rectory. Otherwise, no graves of plague victims can be seen in the churchyard, although the earlier ones would have been buried there.

Today Eyam’s population is not far short of 1,000. That’s higher than before the plague years of 1665-6 when, though sources differ, it was probably around 700 from what seem to be good estimates. Obtaining reasonably accurate numbers is an issue in making comparisons although, unlike most places, there is a very clear and presumably reasonably accurate record of the number of deaths in Eyam, i.e. the 260 on the list below. Even then, though, this might include some death not attributable to the plague, whilst one site says that “the Church has a record of 273 deaths due to the plague”.



Here inscribed are the names of those inhabitants of Eyam who died during the Plague. years 1665–1666.

Some sources put Eyam’s mortality as high as 80%, which seems highly unlikely. If the population was 700, it actually suffered about 36% mortality – still horrific, and rather higher than what seems to be the average rate from the outbreak of somewhere in the region of 25%. Many estimates for London are around that rate, though some are rather higher, but all are uncertain because both population and deaths are not accurately known. There was a tendency to under-report the numbers succumbing, even if those making and keeping the records had not themselves become victims.

Clearly, the inhabitants of Eyam paid a high price for their courage, but studies have shown that they probably saved many thousands of lives further afield. Their sacrifice has also been very valuable in continuing to save lives to this day. The value of quarantine to contain the spread of a disease has been clear for a long time, but how best to achieve that rests on how the disease is passed on. With the daily death information provided by Eyam’s register, rather than inaccurate weekly figures elsewhere, it was possible to better understand how bubonic plague is transmitted. In fact, person-to-person transmission proved considerably more important in Eyam than, as previously thought, rat-to-person. Fleeing had once been thought to cause the plague-carrying rats to die and the outbreak to peter out, but clearly this wouldn’t help if people continued to pass the plague on. Eyam did indeed stem the spread of the epidemic, albeit at a tragic cost to those isolated there.

EYAM MUSEUM

The village is worth a visit if you’re in the area, with an excellent museum about the plague and the village history generally. There’s a National Trust manor house and walks, both through the village and to the sites mentioned here, with excellent Peak District views. The museum website provides a map (https://www.eyam-museum.org.uk/).

Geoff Taylor

View from Above No. 51:
Heywood Castle

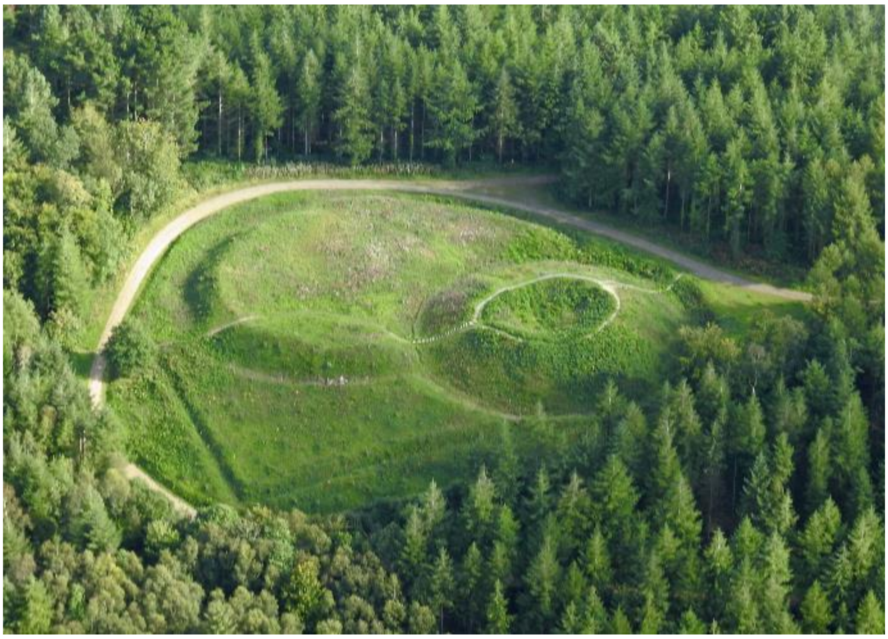
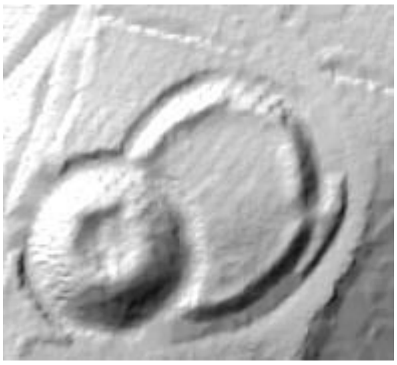
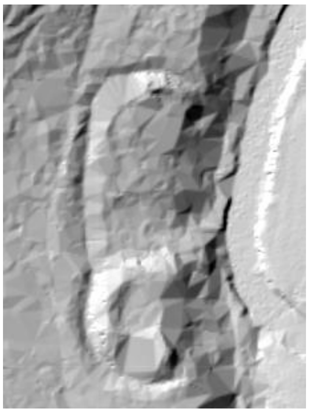


Photo by Sue Newman and Jo Crane

This very typical abandoned Norman motte and bailey is in Heywood Wood, Devon, about 19 miles north-west of Exeter. The location is given as Heywood Wood, Eggesford, which can cause some confusion with Eggesford Castle to the south, also in Heywood Wood and only 500m away. Internet searches for one sometimes give the other, and I have been unable to find a photograph of Eggesford (the only one that seems likely to be in the right place is basically of trees obscuring any ground features).



Heywood Castle's motte is about 8m high and 49m in diameter, surrounded by a rock-cut ditch 2m deep. The crescent-shaped bailey to the north-east is about 40x60m. The LIDAR image (right) seems to show a depression in the centre of the motte but, as far as I can tell, it is actually the result of a 4m high bank around the top. Its site is in a fairly commanding and impressive position on a ridge overlooking the River Taw to the east, with the original entrance on that side.



Eggesford Castle (left) is described as a motte and bailey and as a ringwork castle in Historic England's schedule listing. The 20x31m mound is only 3.5m high, with the bailey 25x72m internally. This seems a much less defensible site; although there is a steep drop to the Taw on the east, it isn't very high and the castle is on much lower ground than Heywood. The castle isn't quite as well preserved as Heywood, with damage apparent in the LIDAR image from ornamental garden work in the 19th century. The castle is in the grounds of the new Eggesford House, built on a new site in 1822 at about the time that the original Eggesford House was demolished, but ruined since 1917.

Neither castle has been excavated as far as is known, with dating thought to be mid-12th century for both. Settlement in this area is very dispersed and there are no signs of anything in the vicinity much bigger than a hamlet, whether pre-existing or planted by the castle owner(s). Why two castles would be built so close together is unclear, though it may be that Eggesford related to a ford that became impassable and/or that the better location of Heywood was felt to be needed. Perhaps a better suggestion is that they both relate to the civil war between Matilda and Stephen in the 1130s and 1140s. Clearly, neither became important enough to progress beyond timber construction.

Geoff Taylor

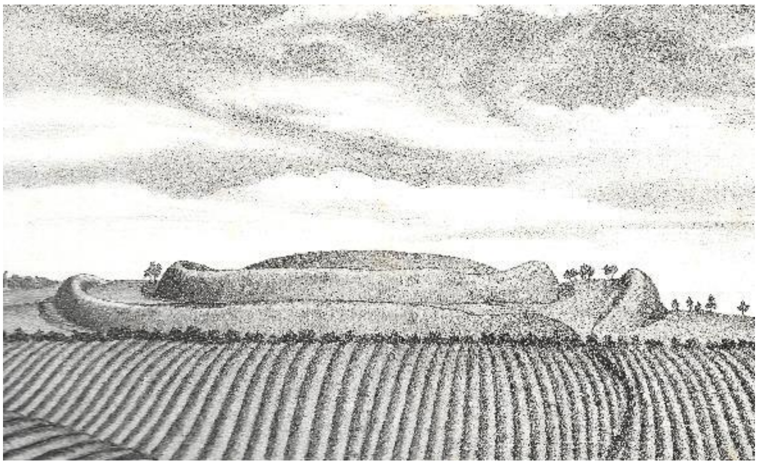
From the Archives 7

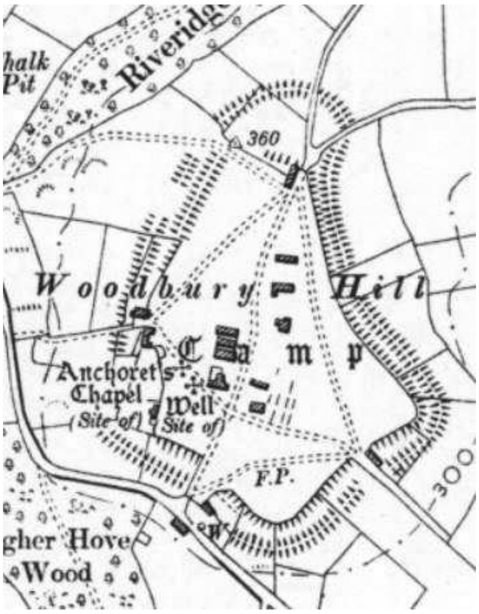
Volume VII of the Proceedings (1886) starts with a request for payment of subscriptions of 10 shillings. Inflation adjusted that's around £63 now, compared with an individual annual subscription now of £52. Some things do get 'cheaper'.

This is another edition where topics of natural history predominate and where I was interested to see a discussion of the origin of volcanoes and earthquakes. At that time there was considerable debate over whether the centre of the earth was solid or not, and how the heat retained below the surface acted to cause volcanoes. Of course, the theory of continental drift wasn't propounded until just over a century ago, whilst plate tectonics was only widely accepted about 60 years ago.

A piece on 'The Amphitheatre at Dorchester' speaks of the Roman origins of what is now visible, known as Maumbury Rings now but then said to be Mambury or Mamebury. It mentions an unsuccessful attempt in 1879 to dig across the entrance to find the "great stone", said to have been buried there because it was an obstacle to cultivation (English Heritage puts the burial at 1846). The article suggests the amphitheatre dated to the time of Agricola, not long after the conquest, though the current view is rather less specific. It was not until 1908-1913 that more extensive excavations took place, showing that the Romans had adapted a Neolithic henge. The supposed great stone proved just as elusive then.

An article on Woodbury Hill, just east of Bere Regis, includes the rather fanciful engraving shown here, from a drawing by the antiquarian William Stukeley in 1724. The article says it is from the south or south-west and calls it "a correct view", describing the hillfort as originally "very regular". Whilst traces remain of the ridge and furrow, the hillfort was never regular in shape, nor did it ever have 2 sets of ramparts except for part of the northwest, as shown on the later 19th century OS map. Although degraded and partly destroyed over time, the ramparts were never very high; indeed, Historic England describe it as a 'slight univallate hillfort'. With the Victorians striving for a better understanding of the past, often with great success, it is a pity that the Proceedings should have accepted such obvious inaccuracies.





The article does a better job of describing Woodbury Hill Fair, established by charters in the 13th century under Henry III, though possibly existing before that. At its height this was held over 5 days starting on September 18th, and was a very important market for which people would travel many miles. The first day was for wholesale trade, with retail trade for the rest of the fair. 'Gentlefolk's Day' was particularly devoted to entertainments, followed by 'All Folk's Day' as the main day of retail trade, then a day for livestock sales. The final 'Pack and Penny Day' saw unsold items sold off at reduced prices. The fair began to decline in the 18th century and the article says its business had then "gone to nothing". By 1938 it had become a 2 day event just for entertainment but then ceased during WWII, after which it was revived but only lasted until 1951.

Geoff Taylor

The Museum of East Dorset in Wimborne has won the ‘Small Visitor Attraction of the Year’ trophy at the Dorset Tourism Awards. Staff and Trustees from the museum joined a host of prestigious businesses and charitable organisations on 26th January for an award ceremony in the setting of the Tank Museum.

Dorset
GOLD AWARD
Small Visitor Attraction of the Year
Museum of East Dorset

Vanessa Joseph
[For those who don’t know her, Vanessa is at the far left, with EDAS member Sara Marshall next to her – ed.]

A couple of the many Dorset ghost stories

Many spirits are said to appear at the atmospheric ruins of the 12th century Knowlton Church, built in the centre of a Neolithic henge. Sightings include a phantom horse and rider, a weeping nun kneeling outside, a ghostly face peering through the window in the tower and a tall cloaked figure dressed in black. One story is that the several ley lines that supposedly pass through the church are twisted and spiralled there (odd, really, as the ‘definition’ of a ley line is surely that it is straight).

There are often ‘New Age’ people visiting the site, as there were when I took my sister there about 13 years ago. She said the place felt cold and somewhat eerie on a sunny and warm summer’s day, though I wonder if she was partly affected by the ethereal music played by one of the visitors. Alas, having lived in Australia for over 40 years, she doesn’t get much chance to experience our ghosts (see also View from Above 28, June 2020).

There are several reports of sighting the ghost of a Roman soldier in Thorncombe Woods near Dorchester. One was in October 1969, when a young member of a camping group rushed back to them to say he’d just seen a ghost in the trees. The sceptical group went to the spot and were amazed to see the figure of a Roman soldier with a shield, sword and helmet. Surprisingly, the figure was standing some way above the ground, and they realised later that it was standing on the site of the Roman road from Badbury Rings, but at the level that it was originally built.

Of course, this type of detail is often included in ghost stories. The ghost is seen in a place that only makes sense if related to the location when the person was alive – on ground or a floor that existed then, passing through a long lost doorway or up some stairs that no longer exist. You can make your own mind up about whether this detail was added to increase credibility or if it actually does make the story more believable.

Geoff Taylor

EDAS PROGRAMME 2023

Unless otherwise stated, and subject to any coronavirus restrictions, lectures are from 7:30 at St Catherine's Church Hall, Lewens Lane, Wimborne, BH21 1LE.

Wed 8th February	Lecture	**Neil Meldrum**	Ancient China
Wed 8th March	AGM & lecture	**To be announced**	Subject tbd
Wed 12th April	Lecture	**Peter Cox**	40 years of archaeology in Dorset
Wed 10th May	Lecture	**Clare Randall**	The manor of Putton and the potential of medieval archaeology in Dorset

DISTRICT DIARY

Wed 15th February	Rockin' all over the world: Stone – an archaeological view	**Wareham Society**	Lilian Ladle
Thu 16th February	A Career in Ruins	**AVAS**	Julian Richards
Thu 16th February	Predicting the location of Neolithic Sites	**Blandford Society**	Alex …
Wed 15th March	Churches, chalices and baths: Recent work on Hadrian's Wall	**Wareham Society**	Mark Corney
Thu 16th March	Medieval …	**Blandford Society**	Cindy …
Thu 16th March	Impacts of environmental/ climate change on human communities over 800,000 years	**AVAS**	Alex Brown and Sander Aerts
Wed 19th April	Down to earth: the story of Sandford Pottery	**Wareham Society**	Patrick Andrews
Thu 20th April	The Congresbury Kiln Assemblage.	**AVAS**	Amy Thorp
Thu 20th April	Archaeology and Mental Health	**Blandford Society**	Megan Russel
Wed 17th May	Dorset Churches	**Wareham Society**	Gordon Le Pard
Thu 18th May	Report on the excavations at Druce Farm Roman villa (tbc)	**Blandford Society**	Lilian Ladle
Wed 21st June	What's in a name? A history of Wareham through its street names	**Wareham Society**	Lilian Ladle

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; membership £10 pa.
- Blandford Museum Archaeology Group:
  https://blandfordtownmuseum.org.uk/groups-and-projects/archaeology-group/
  Meetings normally 7:30pm 3rd Thursday of each month September to May at Blandford Parish Centre, The Tabernacle, DT11 7DW. 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.
- The Christchurch Antiquarians: https://christchurchantiquarians.wordpress.com/
  No lecture programme but involved in practical archaeology projects. Membership £10 pa.
- Dorset Natural History & Archaeology Society: http://www.dorsetcountymuseum.org/events
  Events at various locations in Dorchester, usually ticketed
- Wareham and District Archaeology & Local History Society: Their website isn't updated but they are on the Wareham Chimes site here, or contact Karen Brown at karen.brown68@btinternet.com.
  Meetings at Furzebrook Village Hall, BH20 5AR, normally 7:30pm 3rd Wednesday of each month except July & August. Visitors welcome for £3; membership £10 pa.