

ROYAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL INSTITUTE  
with  
The Prehistoric Society and The Cumberland &  
Westmorland Antiquarian & Archaeological Society

## THE NEOLITHIC OF NORTHERN ENGLAND

**Annual Conference 2016**  
**21-23 October**

Tullie House  
Museum and Art Gallery  
Carlisle



**THE  
PREHISTORIC  
SOCIETY**  
SINCE 1935



CUMBERLAND AND WESTMORLAND  
ANTIQUARIAN AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY



**Venue: Tullie House Museum, Castle Street, Carlisle, Cumbria CA3 8TP**

**Friday, 21 October**

From 17.00: Registration at Tullie House Museum

18.30 Key-note speakers: Richard Bradley and Aaron Watson: 'Axes and Images'

Wine reception

**Saturday, 22 October**

9.30 Fraser Brown: 'Mesolithic/Neolithic transitions at Stainton West on the River Eden, North Cumbria'

10.10 Seren Griffiths: 'The last warriors of the wise race? Or dating the last hunter gatherers and the first farmers in northern Britain'

**10.50 Coffee**

11.20 Alison Sheridan: 'A view from north of the border'

12.00 Clive Waddington: 'The timing and character of Neolithic settlement in North East England'

**12.50 Lunch**

13.50 Yvonne Luke: 'An emerging 'Neolithic in the Yorkshire Dales'

14.30 Antony Dickson, Denise Druce and Helen Evans: 'New evidence for Neolithic settlement in the North West'

**15.10 Tea**

15.40 Al Oswald: 'Causewayed enclosures of the North'

16.20 Julian Thomas: 'Revisiting some Neolithic monuments in Dumfries and Galloway'

Optional Buffet Supper

**Sunday, 23 October**

9.30 Paul Frodsham: 'Recent work at Long Meg, Cumbria'

10.10 Alex Gibson: 'New work at the Pennine henges – Tales of the Unexpected'

**10.50 Coffee**

11.20 Andrew Fitzpatrick and Paul Frodsham: 'The end of the Neolithic? Kirkhaugh and the earliest Bell Beakers in northern England'

12.00 Round up and discussion

**13.00 Close**



## THE NEOLITHIC OF NORTHERN ENGLAND

*Friday 22nd October*

### *Axes and images*

*Richard Bradley and Aaron Watson*

In the 1980s and early 90s stone axes made in the Langdale Fells provided some of the best evidence for the extent of long distance contacts in the Northern Neolithic. Since that time the situation has changed and our contribution will consider some of the new developments. Its starting point will be the production of Cumbrian axes, but in 2016 they must be viewed in a different light. New dates for samples from the production sites suggest that their main period of operation was between 3800 and 3500 BC, although Group VI tuff was also used to make 'wrist guards' during the Beaker phase. Just as important, the revised dating of Impressed Ware (Peterborough Ware) means that some of the contexts associated with Cumbrian axes can no longer be considered as Late Neolithic, undermining any direct connection between henge monuments and the distribution of these artefacts. If they were exchanged at major monuments, causewayed enclosures provide more plausible candidates. The results of field walking in the Vale of Eden can shed some light on this question.

Another discovery since the excavations at Langdale is the rock art at Copt Howe on the valley floor. Recent work has shed new light on the character of the images, showing that they are related to Irish megalithic art rather than the cup and ring carvings that are so common in other parts of Northern Britain. Because they are similar to the designs associated with passage tombs, it is unlikely that any of them were contemporary with the main period of axe production at Langdale. Instead they may be contemporary with Grooved Ware and its associations, with early henges and perhaps with the rock art close to the monuments around Penrith. Related designs were shared between communities on either side of the Irish Sea and were distributed from Orkney to Wessex.

This suggests the existence of at least two separate and possibly successive networks during the Northern Neolithic, one of them associated with the interchange of portable objects, and other more strongly connected with the sharing of ideas represented by a distinctive style of rock art and its counterparts in other media. It involved a heightened concern with special places and with a distant past, both of them epitomised by the history of the Cumbrian Mountains. That is why our paper is called 'Axes and images'.

*Saturday 23rd October*

### *Mesolithic/Neolithic transitions at Stainton West, on the River Eden, North Cumbria*

*Fraser Brown*

In 2008-9, Oxford Archaeology North undertook the excavation of internationally significant prehistoric remains at Stainton West, near to Carlisle. There, archaeological features and a huge (>300,000 pieces), *in situ*, lithic assemblage, survived on a buried land surface adjacent to a palaeochannel of the River Eden. This appears to have been a 'persistent place', with human activity spanning c 6000-1400 cal BC. Hunter-gatherers made camp there from the beginning of this time and an extensive encampment, probably a place of seasonal aggregation, was occupied over several centuries in the mid-fifth millennium cal BC. In the Neolithic period and Bronze Age, the site seems to have played a rather different role, probably hosting votive activities rather than being a place of settlement. Using the Stainton West evidence, it will be argued that several characteristics, traditionally viewed as aspects of the Cumbrian Neolithic, were already present in the late Mesolithic period. This is to say that they were not the innovations of farming societies, instead they can be traced back to hunter-gatherers. On the other hand, it will also be suggested that new practices and ways of behaving did first appear in the region during the early part of the fourth millennium cal BC.

### *The last warriors of the wise race? Or dating the beginning of the last hunter-gatherers and first farmers in northern Britain*

*Seren Griffiths*

The last ten years have seen a range of discoveries which have developed our understandings of the early Neolithic archaeology in the North of Britain, as the result of commercial, research and public archaeology

projects. This has been coupled with a range of analysis programmes which have developed our understandings of chronologies and material culture. This paper will discuss a number of important sites in the north of England, and the northern and western isles of Scotland to discuss how and if these sites challenge our archaeological approaches to the early Neolithic. This paper will seek to place some of our new evidence for the timing and tempo of the early Neolithic in a wider epistemological context, discussing how our new sites and analyses can contribute to a more critical representation of the Mesolithic Neolithic transition.

### ***A view from north of the border***

*Alison Sheridan*

In order to understand the Neolithic of the north of England – the area where, according to Whittle *et al* in their *Gathering Time* volume, ‘There be dragons’ – it is essential to take a ‘big picture’ view as well as focusing in on defining regional and local narratives (as will be done in other presentations). This contribution will seek to situate developments in northern England within this ‘big picture’ perspective, and in particular to examine what was happening there in relation to what was happening further north, in what is now Scotland. It will review the evidence in three time slices: ‘Beginnings and initial developments, to c 3500 BC’; ‘Middle Neolithic developments, c 3500–3000/2900 BC’; and ‘Late Neolithic developments, 3000/2900 –2500/2400 BC’. It will highlight the most pressing outstanding questions, and the parts of northern England (aka God’s own country) where our picture is especially hazy.

### ***The timing and character of Neolithic settlement in North East England***

*Clive Waddington*

With the palaeogeography of the British Isles only settling down to more or less its current configuration in the centuries around 4000 cal BC, North East England (and South-East Scotland for that matter) occupied an important geographic axis within the North Sea basin throughout the Mesolithic and into the beginning of the Neolithic. Understanding the timing and character of Neolithic activity in this region therefore has wider implications for addressing some of the ‘big’ questions about the Neolithic and its adoption. This paper will start with a consideration of the wider environmental context of the region before discussing the evidence for the timing and character of the Neolithic. Consideration of settlement, subsistence and ceramics will form the central topics of the presentation augmented by the results of recent fieldwork. The paper will conclude by relating the results from the region to the wider Neolithic of the British Isles and identifying key topics for future research in the region.

### ***An emerging Neolithic in the Yorkshire Dales***

*Yvonne Luke*

It had long been thought that the Yorkshire Dales, with one exception, contained no evidence of Neolithic long mounds. On reflection this was a curious state of affairs, as the dominant geology is limestone, known to support a preferred natural environment for early farming communities. There is also widespread proof of the existence of Neolithic cultures here through a variety of evidence from cave burials to palaeo-environmental indications. Since 2008 extensive fieldwork here and in adjacent areas of the Pennines has revealed the existence of previously unnoticed Neolithic type cairns and barrows: long, oval and associated round cairns. The reasons for their ‘invisibility’ - basically a very busy archaeological landscape which is still under-researched and under-recorded, and a distracting geomorphological backdrop – helped define a tight methodology to aid their identification.

There are now several dozen potential Neolithic monuments within the study area which require further investigation. However, initial research already suggests the existence of two different types of monuments which are separated by size, material, orientation and topographic position. The long cairns are generally smaller, higher up in the landscape, and frequently orientated on the pre-eminent local mountains, still celebrated today as the Three Peaks: Ingleborough, Pen-y-ghent and Wharfedale. The long barrows are larger, and usually found low down in the river valleys. Crucially, for the confirmation of this exploratory research, the two groups have a separate and distinct geographical spread. The long cairns are found in the west of the Pennines, in particular around the Ingleborough Massif. The long barrows are scattered around the eastern dales, very much relating to the river systems which drain eastwards into the North Sea: Swaledale, Wensleydale, Wharfedale.

A closer look at the groups of cairns in the Ingleborough area reveals an intense preoccupation by their builders with its distinctive isolated peaks. Very particular places appear to have been chosen for the location of the cairns, locations which bind the monuments to the mountain summits and the two major solstitial events of the year: midsummer and, above all, midwinter. These events can be witnessed today from these special places.

This preliminary research into the distribution of potential Neolithic barrows and cairns suggests the existence of distinct cultures on both sides of the Pennines meeting at the watershed. The results of this research may change our perception of the Neolithic not just in Yorkshire but the North of England as a whole. There is now some hope of filling the 'gap on the map' between the comparatively well documented Neolithics of Cumbria and the Yorkshire Wolds, and understanding better the regional dynamics of the farming revolution in this centrally important part of Britain.

### ***New evidence for Neolithic settlement in the North West***

*Antony Dickson, Denise Druce and Helen Evans*

West of the Pennines, and seemingly marginal to the Irish Sea regions, Cumbria and Lancashire have traditionally been understood as being backward in relation to their neighbours. If it weren't for Cumbria's stone circles and axe production sites in its central fells, the region wouldn't appear at all in grand narratives of the northern Neolithic. But things are on the up. The last decade or so has produced some important research, new sites, radiocarbon dates and environmental data. With these, and with contemporary chronological and interpretative frameworks in mind, we have begun to re-analyse and re-interpret evidence derived from the long history of research in the area. The character and distribution of monuments, lithic scatters and environmental data allow us not only to fill out the detail of long-held interpretations, but also to challenge assumptions regarding the nature and scale of Neolithic activity across the region.

### ***Causewayed enclosures of the North.***

*Al Oswald*

When *The Creation of Monuments* was published in 2001, the distribution of convincing causewayed enclosures in the British Isles had been halted on the banks of the Trent for twenty-five years, with the exception of the excavated example on Donegore Hill in Northern Ireland and a newly discovered site on Green How in northern Cumbria. Despite the prevailing emphasis on regionalism, it looked as though we might after all be saddled with a good, old-fashioned 'core/periphery model' - recently caricatured as "*ex Kent lux*". This hypothesis left us scrutinizing a rag-tag assortment of 'atypical' enclosures in the North which might stand in for the causewayed enclosures so densely distributed in southern and central England.

Green How, and more recent discoveries elsewhere in northern England of enclosures of 'classic' causewayed form, have not (yet) told us much more about exactly what went on at these enigmatic sites, but the emerging distribution pattern tends to support a different model of the movement of people and ideas, perhaps closer to that argued for by Alison Sheridan. In recent years, various scholars have strongly denied that there was ever any 'blueprint' for particular types of monument in the Early Neolithic. Some of the newly discovered causewayed enclosures suggest that, on the contrary, architectural blueprints **did** exist and were sometimes carried to regions well beyond the supposed 'core', where people implemented them with virtually no local adjustment. It is likely, and to some extent desirable, that research over the coming years will focus on one or more of the newly discovered 'classic' causewayed enclosures, but at this stage it appears unlikely that their uses will differ dramatically from the fair-like medley of functions attested in the South. We should therefore be very careful not to let the 'atypical' sites drop off our radar entirely.

### ***Revisiting Some Neolithic Monuments in Dumfries and Galloway***

*Julian Thomas*

A little to the north of northern England, a series of Neolithic (and in one case, Early Bronze Age) monuments were investigated with the support of Historic Scotland at around the start of the present millennium. These included the post alignments at Holme Farm, the cursus monuments at Holywood and Dunragit, the palisade enclosure at Dunragit, and the henge of Pict's Knowe. Together these gave some insights into idiosyncratic local patterns of

construction and deposition. Since these excavations took place a number of developments have taken place that potentially cast some of these structures into a new light. In this contribution I will give an overview of the sites, while building upon existing interpretations.

### *Sunday 23rd October*

#### *Recent work at Long Meg*

*Paul Frodsham*

Given that the Long Meg complex represents one of northern England's most evocative and potentially informative prehistoric sites, located at the heart of Neolithic Britain, its lack of attention from archaeologists over recent decades may be regarded as a trifle odd. As part of the North Pennines AONB Partnership's recent Altogether Archaeology project, detailed survey and small-scale excavation projects were completed here in 2014 and 2015, in partnership with Durham University and Oxford Archaeology North. In 2014 detailed topographic and geophysical surveys of the stone circle and adjacent enclosure were completed, along with high-resolution 3D modelling of individual stones within the circle. In 2015 a programme of small-scale excavation was undertaken primarily to investigate the relationship between the enclosure and the stone circle, while also seeking absolute dates for both. This work was also designed very much as an evaluation to assess the condition of buried deposits and the potential for further work, the intention being to use the results to inform a comprehensive Management Framework for future research, conservation and interpretation.

This presentation will include a brief overview of past work at Long Meg, followed by a discussion of the results of the Altogether Archaeology survey and excavation projects. The survey reinforces the intimate links between the site, its local landscape and the heavens. The excavations have demonstrated for the first time the nature of the enclosure ditches, although the exact form of the enclosure remains, for the time being, elusive. Radiocarbon dates, the implications of which will be discussed in some detail, extend across nearly 6,000 years from late Mesolithic to early medieval times. An outline sequence of developments at Long Meg from the late Mesolithic to the late Neolithic will be suggested, although aspects of this may well be rendered redundant by further work. Finds, though few in number, include Langdale tuff, flint and Arran pitchstone, reflecting the site's pivotal landscape location with regard to cross-Pennine networks and the wider Neolithic world.

#### *New Work at the Pennine Henges – Tales of the Unexpected*

*Alex Gibson*

In terms of the Neolithic and Bronze Age the Yorkshire Dales are seen as somewhat of a backwater between the axe factories of Cumbria, the richness of the Wolds and A1 corridor. They lack the Antiquarian collections of Greenwell to the north and Bateman to the south or the early 'rescue' excavations of Mortimer to the east. Similarly, being within the National Park large-scale development excavations are absent and being largely given to grass- or moorland aerial reconnaissance has limited results. Yet there are hints of occupation from the Neolithic dates and skeletal remains from the caves as well as ceramic and lithic scatters. The recent work at the northern and southern henges of Castle Dykes and Yarnbury and the application of large scale geophysical survey has shown the potential of what may lie hidden beneath the upland pastures. Although only relatively small windows, the results suggest that the Dales have the potential to be more mainstream than peripheral. The surveys have produced some spectacular and unexpected results shedding light on the archaeology of the Dales from the Neolithic to the Iron Age.

#### *The end of the Neolithic? Kirkhaugh and the earliest Bell Beakers in northern England*

*Andrew Fitzpatrick and Paul Frodsham*

The cairn at Kirkhaugh, Northumberland was identified in 1935 and investigated that year by Herbert Maryon whose report was promptly published in *Archaeologia Aeliana*. This paper will present the results of a new study of the find prompted by the identification of one of the stone tools that Maryon found as a metalworking tool.

Although Maryon did not find a grave or a body, the types of objects he excavated are often found in early Bell Beaker graves. Only a very small number of probable early Bell Beaker graves are known in Cumbria, Durham

and Northumberland and in view of this, the location of Kirkhaugh is notable in lying in the uplands, high in the South Tyne Valley.

The new study has shown that there was a grave at Kirkhaugh and that, although no bone survived, the burial was probably of male. It is likely that the grave was covered by a small earthen mound. A number of additional grave goods were also found and the whole assemblage is typical of those found with the well-furnished burials of metalworkers.

Kirkhaugh lies on the edge of one of the most important metal orefields in Britain. Although the Alston orefield is best known for its lead, other minerals were mined in modern times, including copper. The exploration of this mineral wealth by Bell Beaker groups may explain the location of the Kirkhaugh grave: did the man die during metal prospecting?

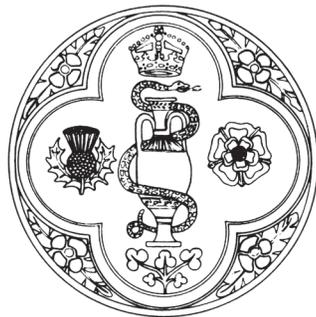
Narratives of the Late Neolithic often focus on monuments while those of the early metal ages often focus on burials and grave goods. Neither narrative addresses the rarity of settlements and the resulting rarity of evidence for cultivation despite farming and longer-lived settlements being two of the defining characteristics of traditional models of the Neolithic.

While the Kirkhaugh grave might typify what is new about Bell Beaker groups and sit comfortably within existing narratives, it should not distract us from recognising how little is currently understood about settlement and subsistence in the Late Neolithic and early metal ages.

### *The speakers*

Richard Bradley	Emeritus Professor of Archaeology, University of Reading
Fraser Brown	Senior Project Manager at Oxford Archaeology North
Antony Dickson	Senior Lithics Specialist, Oxford Archaeology North
Denise Druce	Senior Palaeoenvironmental Specialist, Oxford Archaeology North
Helen Evans	Heritage Management Officer, Oxford Archaeology North
Paul Frodsham	ORACLE Heritage Services
Alex Gibson	Reader in British Prehistory, University of Bradford
Seren Griffiths	Lecturer, University of Central Lancashire
Andrew Fitzpatrick	Postdoctoral Research Associate, University of Leicester
Yvonne Luke	PhD research student University of Bradford
Al Oswald	PhD research student, University of York (formerly English Heritage)
Alison Sheridan	Principal Curator of Early Prehistory, National Museum of Scotland
Julian Thomas	Professor of Archaeology, School of Arts, Languages and Cultures, University of Manchester
Clive Waddington	Managing Director, Archaeological Research Services Ltd
Aaron Watson	Freelance archaeologist ( <a href="http://aaronwatson.co.uk">aaronwatson.co.uk</a> ) and Creative Director of Monumental





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