

A New Window on the Past – Dorset Archaeology 2025

Summaries

Michael Gill, Avon Valley Archaeological Society

'Long time no see?' Peering underground to reveal the long barrows of East Dorset

The long barrows of East Dorset form part of a dense cluster of Early Neolithic monuments on the chalk of Cranborne Chase. Despite the repeated archaeological scrutiny of this region over a number of centuries, the long barrows themselves as a distinct class of monument have largely escaped detailed study. To redress this balance, Avon Valley Archaeological Society (AVAS), in conjunction with a community project led by Bournemouth University, has undertaken a series of geophysical surveys of long barrows in the region. This talk will describe the stunning survey results, revealing detailed characteristics of these enigmatic monuments.

Andrea Frankham-Hughes, Bournemouth University (MRes student)

'Life and death on the edge': investigating the people of Portland at the end of the Iron Age through the first modern assessment of the burial record

Portland has a rich archaeological history, with significant discoveries from the Bronze Age, Iron Age and Romano British periods. However, its archaeology remains surprisingly understudied in comparison to other parts of the region.

In 2006 investigations at The Royal Manor School, Weston uncovered an Iron Age cemetery (Palmer and Reilly 2009) with twenty nine burials revealed across two adjoining sectors. The research focuses on the identification of funerary practices through osteological and archaeoanthatological studies of the skeletal remains from Weston (the first ones for Portland) providing a comparison with mainland Dorset Durotrigian burials and identifying any cultural behaviours that are unique to the Island.

Naomi Payne, AC Archaeology

A Multi-period site at Maiden Newton with an interesting early-medieval finds assemblage

An open area excavation was undertaken by AC Archaeology on land at The Quarr, Maiden Newton, between September and December 2023. The remains of a substantial rectangular stone-built structure of Roman date were exposed, with a small number of pits and ditches suggesting ancillary activity and plot divisions. Roman period finds, although largely residual in medieval deposits, suggested activity on the site through the Roman period, with a 3rd to 4th century focus. Early-medieval pottery indicated some use of the site from the 5th to 8th century, with later activity largely focussed on the 11th to 12th centuries. The finds assemblage of this date is particularly interesting, with a number of unusual and evocative artefacts potentially reflecting high-status activity centred around reuse and reoccupation of the earlier, Roman-period structure.

Sean Doherty, Exeter University

From Egypt to Dorset: The domestication and dispersal of the cat

In this talk Sean will present new research into the cat's bio-cultural history, from its domestication in Egypt c. 2000 BC to its movement across Europe by Iron Age, Roman, Viking and Christian communities. He will chart the cat's changing relationship with humans, and discuss how an archaeological find from Dorset has rewritten the species' history.

Hannah Britton, Exeter University

Falconry birds at Dorchester: The importance of revisiting old collections

In this talk Hannah will present new research into the archaeology of British falconry practice through the re-examination of two birds excavated from Dorchester. She will explore how these birds, despite being overlooked for many years, has re-shaped our understanding of falconry practice, demonstrating the value of re-visiting old archaeological collections.

Eva Heimpel, Cotswold Archaeology

The secrets of Came Estate: from Bronze Age Barrows to a D-Day Camp.

As part of an ongoing conservation strategy for the archaeology within Came Wood, a landscape survey and historic building recording were undertaken. This recorded the surviving remains within the woodland to ensure their future protection. Listen to one of a Senior Heritage Consultants talk about the process and results.

Phil Trim, Wessex Archaeology

The Moors at Arne

Part 1 Excavations 2023-24: Detailing evidence of prehistoric exploitation of a wetland environment on the southern shores of Poole Harbour in prehistory.

Part 2 Excavations 2024: Excavation of a Romano-British pottery production site on the southern shores of Poole Harbour.

Peter Bellamy, Terrain Archaeology

'Scrapings and scratchings': secular graffiti at Manor Farm Barn, Winterborne Clenston

Historic building recording of a barn built in the sixteenth century, incorporating an earlier roof, and an interior covered in charming and perplexing graffiti. A project carried out with funding from the Dorset National Landscape.