

## Discussion notes from the South-East Research Framework Public Seminar on the Neolithic to early Bronze Age (08/12/07)

**Chair:** Paul Garwood (a.m.), David Field (p.m.)

**Speakers:** Mike Allen, David Field, Chris Hayden, Frances Healy, Julie Gardiner, Paul Garwood, Martyn Barber, Keith Parfitt and Stuart Needham

**Notes:** Jake Weekes

Proceedings papers supplied by individual speakers can be viewed elsewhere on the SERF web pages. These notes are taken from open discussion in response to the papers as well as more general contributions.

### **Environment and landscape during the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age**

Mike Allen

- River valleys may well conceal important sites buried beneath later deposits. In the Ouse valley in Sussex, for example, a single charred cereal grain dating to the Neolithic was recently found during boreholing: what else awaits discovery?
- Another important issue to redress is the lack of environmental information in conjunction with archaeological data. Such data are particularly to be sought in coastal and riverine conditions, but it would also be a good strategy to target (including palynology) specific areas in the Weald, for example at Horsham, and also to return to areas where good environmental has been done in order to consolidate results (e.g. the work of Scaife and Burrin in Sussex).

### **Neolithic geography and the English Channel, or Nu-mohk-muck-a-nah and the Great Flood**

David Field

- Ancient beaver activity and its impact on environment and culture needs to be understood better
- The movement of objects such as polished axes over various distances needs further study within the region. In terms of materials, it is sometimes difficult to pin down provenance, but the idea of Greensand quarries is worth further exploration
- Recognition of submerged areas beyond the present day coast needs to be acknowledged so researchers can start to understand the true context of inland sites. Dredging and borehole work (also inland for colluvial and alluvial sites) are beginning to produce much evidence. Wessex Archaeology in particular is pioneering methods for sampling the seabed. Such work is expensive, but doing

nothing is not an option if we are going to understand the entire Neolithic landscape. Seismic data for the Channel does exist commercially but archaeologists are not accessing it, and some companies throw it away after a certain amount of time. A huge wind farm, soon to be built in outer Thames Estuary, will hopefully add important new data for that area.

### **Neolithic Structures at White Horse Stone**

Chris Hayden

- In terms of the debate over the function of buildings at White Horse Stone, it should be remembered that domestic and ceremonial use are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

### **Causewayed enclosures and the Early Neolithic: the chronology of monument building and settlement in South-East England in the early and mid- fourth millennium *cal* BC**

Frances Healy

- An old aerial photograph of the Burham area apparently provides evidence for a possible second enclosure there, too. On the opposite side of the dry valley from Chalk Hill, Ramsgate, a second section of interrupted ditch has been found more recently at Pegwell.

### **Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age round barrows and funerary practices**

Paul Garwood (PG)

- Ritual aspects of funerary practices, in particular the dismemberment and movement of body parts after death, need careful study: did such practices, for example, involve returning body parts to places of origin?
- Movement of body parts as part of funerary ritual is certainly associated with the Neolithic, but such behaviour was relatively rare in the Early Bronze Age. In both cases, it is most important that we are dealing with the use of the body as a symbolic object, as with the remains of young children being 're-invested' in monuments (there also appear to be examples of neonates inhumed at exactly the same time as adult males, suggesting the possibility of what we would call a form of human sacrifice)
- Changes in material culture (either associated with the living or the dead) were not a simple reflection of movements of people, and that ideas rather than people were the key aspect to consider
- Oxygen isotope analysis on dentition has traced a Neolithic woman whose remains were recovered from a pit in Dorset to the Mendips region (another recent

example is the so called 'Amesbury Archer' from Wiltshire, a Beaker period burial of a man who originated in the Alpine region).

## **Ringlemere Henge**

Keith Parfitt

- The Ringlemere henge ditch does not appear to have been re-cut, while Beaker material was found in the mound. The core of the mound was made of turf and the outside of clay. In other words, the mound builders seem to have de-turfed a large area around the monument rather than using material from the ditch. Dating evidence for the construction of the mound consists of beaker sherds, and stylistic features on these suggest that the building event couldn't be earlier than *c.*2250 BC, and was probably early in the second millennium BC. The Ringlemere Cup and finds of amber beads give a *terminus ante quem* for the mound of about 1800 BC
- In terms of henge monuments in general, perhaps researchers should be asking why there are any monuments at all, rather than why they sometimes do not appear to be there. There could have been much ceremonial activity that had nothing to do with monuments. Intensive, focussed systematic analysis is needed in order to begin to resolve such questions.

## **General discussion points**

- The Weald was highlighted as an area that needs considerably more focussed study and understanding. This and other under-researched areas need to be prioritised (avoiding a cycle of returning to places where research has yielded information most readily in the past). Concentrations of data are often the result of a local focus of particular enthusiasts, while the focus of academic work is to a large extent governed by research interests rather than research priorities *per se*. Recent CBA South East conferences on the Weald have drawn attention to the question as to whether the area was indeed a bridge or a barrier. It was pointed out that local areas are always the first interest of locals, and that this is an important starting point in generating interest and research activity. Local societies provide a key resource here
- A further problem identified is that developer-led fieldwork tends to machine away topsoil sites: a research framework is needed for these types of sites. Some work on the Weald is being done but does not seem to have been reported widely enough. It was argued that there is also often an assumption that there is nothing to find in the Weald
- Historic Environment Records (HERs) held at County Councils and elsewhere are one of the key resources for new research, but criteria of data input and sorting are different both between and within different databases, making regional comparison difficult. The fact that HERs can be difficult to access and use for research purposes, stems from the fact that they have tended to be seen purely as a

development control device, and not a research tool. It was noted that the Kent HER is currently undergoing considerable enhancement, and that it would be available on-line next year

- The apparent disparity between the North and South Downs was also raised once again, it being pointed out that the North Downs have much more Clay-with-Flints deposits, while the South Downs tended to attract most antiquarian attention in the past
- The use of LIDAR would be an extremely useful (but expensive, at the moment at least) method of remote sensing the wooded areas of the North Downs as well as the Weald. Results of such surveys could then be compared with the findings from
- Deep-sea fishing might have encouraged more contact between late Neolithic and early Bronze Age societies either side of the Channel/North Sea?