

Books

Towards a New Stone Age: aspects of the Neolithic in south east England

Jonathan Cotton and David Field (eds)

CBA Research Report, 2004

185 pages with black and white photographs and drawings, bibliography and index, £28

This book, which comprises 21 chapters written by a collection of expert authors, makes a major contribution to our knowledge of the Neolithic (4th and 3rd millennia BC) in Britain. It does so by focusing on what was going on in south-east England, close to Europe and with a major river route to the centre of southern England. The importance of this region during the Neolithic is often overlooked and it is appropriate that the volume opens with a paper describing how our view of the period has evolved, from one that was Wessex-dominated to one that emphasises indigenous adaptation and regional/local diversity. A balance is provided by the final paper, which assesses the strength of links between Europe and Britain during this formative period.

The Mesolithic-Neolithic transition is covered in two papers. One of these discusses how the transition can be defined and argues that social competition was a motivating force for change. The other describes an important site in the Surrey Weald, with unusual features that might reflect the influence of newcomers.

The volume goes on to demonstrate how a rich and coherent picture of the Neolithic can be built by piecing together specialist information from diverse research endeavours. For example, two papers highlight the importance of understanding changing topography, the evolution of the major river systems and floodplain ecology. We are also reminded of the importance of aerial photography and the National Mapping Programme, soil science and paleosols for determining land-use

trends and Neolithic human remains – although the latter are generally infrequent in this region.

Several papers show how the sheer scale of developer-funded field work has been of tremendous value in identifying ephemeral traces of the Neolithic period. This is well attested by work in the Middle Thames Valley. Here, extensive linear excavations at the Maidenhead/Windsor flood alleviation scheme and the Eton Rowing Course led to the discovery of an array of finds including two gigantic early Neolithic domestic middens and groups of late Neolithic pits showing evidence of classified disposal. On the higher gravel terraces, clusters of pits and early to mid-Neolithic monuments have been discovered. The magnificent Stanwell cursus is given special attention with an interpretation of its significance that encompasses landscape history and geology. Other monuments covered in this volume are the oval barrows on the Isle of Thanet and the causewayed enclosure at Yeoveney Lodge, Staines.

Sacred locations and their meaning are explored more explicitly in papers on a sandpit ritual deposition site, flint mines and monumental architecture in general. They are prefaced by an enjoyable essay that explores the non-utilitarian aspects of Neolithic human response to place and landscape. The scenarios put forward by the author, are pleasingly plausible because they are rooted in archaeological fact and pragmatic inter-site and inter-period comparisons.

In addition to these broad issues the value of artefacts is not forgotten: there are papers on an aurochs bone scoop and Grooved Ware from the Lower Colne Valley, an alder club from the Thames peats, and Peterborough bowls. One Peterborough bowl has exquisitely preserved fingertip impressions that provide an unusually intimate glimpse of Neolithic life.

section analysis of a range of wares, and Inductively Coupled Plasma Atomic Absorption Spectroscopy analysis (ICPS) of selected chaff-tempered wares, mainly by Alan Vince.

11. H. Hamerow *Mucking. Volume 2: the Anglo-Saxon settlement* (1993); see also L. Blackmore *op cit* fn 16 and 17.
12. Excavations by AOC Archaeology at LCR99 and FLR00 (*op cit* fn 7).
13. L. Blackmore 'The origins of *Lundenwic*?' *Archaeology Matters* 11 (2000).

14. Thin-sections were made of six sherds, and five samples were also submitted for ICPS analysis.
15. A. Vince in R. Cowie and L. Blackmore, *op cit* fn 10.
16. TS sample V1485, [13].
17. TS/ICPS sample V1488, [13].
18. Sample V1490, [13].
19. Samples nos. V1486 [48]; V1487 [0], and V1489, [45].
20. Site code DRY90; *op cit* fn 15.
21. R. Cowie and L. Blackmore, *op cit* fn 10.

Overall, this volume provides a cohesive summary of recent work, packed with new information and surprises, that force us to take a fresh look at this period of British prehistory. It draws attention to the rich and distinctive nature of the archaeological record for the Neolithic in SE England and at the same time provides a very good read and a valuable set of references.

Yvonne Edwards

Lambeth unearthed: an archaeological history of Lambeth

Graham Gower with Kieron Tyler

Museum of London Archaeology Service, 2003

64 pages, copiously illustrated in colour and in black and white, with bibliography. Paperback. £4.95

The authors start with a general introduction to archaeology – explaining how it can unlock the secrets of the past – but this book is really the life story of the London Borough of Lambeth.

Early chapters take the reader through the topography of the borough, detailing the (inevitably somewhat limited) evidence for prehistoric activity from the Palaeolithic period through to the Iron Age, and noting the influence of Roman road-builders as indicated by the construction of Stane Street and the route to Sussex. There is little evidence of settlement at this time, although some remains of Saxon occupation have been found, including material from Clapham village, and the area is described in the Domesday Book as “agricultural and sparsely populated”.

It is only in the medieval period that Lambeth starts to assume an identity as a linear village along the waterside, followed by the creation of hamlets along an old dry route through the marshes. Great houses such as Lambeth Palace (“an island of history”) are described, and Streatham is shown as an important medieval centre for the manufacture of building material.

The construction of bridges over the Thames at Westminster, Waterloo and Lambeth from the 18th century onwards is seen as a major agent for change and growth in the borough, stimulating the development of housing along the routes to the bridges. Lambeth becomes a place of leisure (with Vauxhall Gardens described as “an early theme park”), and a place for industry. Breweries and distilleries grow up along the riverside in the 17th and 18th centuries, and this area becomes a major production centre for pottery and glassware.

Factories that were established in the 19th century include the *Vauxhall Ironworks*, which followed its initial production of boat engines by building its first car in 1903 – two years later it left the borough and moved to Luton. The *Artificial Stone Manufactory* was responsible for the South Bank lion, currently at the Lambeth end of Westminster Bridge, and the excavation of one of *Doultons’* architectural ceramics sites in 2001 unearthed important evidence of products and manufacturing processes.

The railways were swiftly extended in the mid-19th century, leading to the development of Clapham, Streatham, Balham, Norwood and Brixton, while the construction of the Albert Embankment was followed in 1871 by that of St Thomas’s Hospital. Although the 20th century is noted for the destruction visited on the borough by World War II, for the Festival of Britain, and for tower block redevelopment, remains of a rural past may still be found in Clapham Common, Norwood and Kennington.

This book, which concludes with a section indicating ways in which readers can find out more about their borough through documents, records and archives, is an admirable introduction to the archaeology and history of Lambeth. Its excellent illustrations complement a text that is well informed, but which does not exclude the average reader by being too technical.

Richard Gilpin

Ceramics in America

Robert Hunter (editor)

Chipstone Foundation, 2003

321 pages, many illustrations, bibliographies, index. Paperback, US\$55

The 2003 edition of this annual series may be of more interest to British archaeologists than others in the series. It comprises articles about pottery of the 18th and 19th centuries from the eastern parts of the USA. This was a time when the American pottery industry was just establishing itself as the country gradually became less dependent on imported wares, so we can see the processes by which a new ceramic industry comes into being. Some of the social aspects are enlightening – did you know, for example, of the *Potters’ Emigration Society*? The pottery itself is familiar but strangely different – almost a sort of parallel universe. In short, this is a fascinating collection of articles for the ceramicist, with some stunning illustrations for everyone.

Clive Orton