

# YCCCART

Yatton Congresbury Claverham and Cleeve Archaeological Research Team

Newsletter September 2019

## Chairman's chat

Welcome to the September edition of the YCCCART newsletter. You will have noticed that there are no photographs on the front page of the newsletter this month. However, there are plenty of images to illustrate all the other articles in the following pages, but we start with an article that highlights yet another threat caused by climate change, namely damage to archaeological remains. A few weeks ago I was listening to Radio 4's serialisation of 'The Fens' by Francis Pryor and he too was concerned about the effects of climate change, the drying out of the peat on the Fens, that has previously preserved biological remains. Janet mentions Starr Carr, in East Yorkshire, which is facing similar problems. With us living in Somerset, which has large tracts of land similar in nature to the Fens, we need to ponder the effects of climate change on our local archaeology.

On a more local theme we are looking at Congresbury mills and public house tokens from a Congresbury pub that has since been demolished. Two YCCCART members have spent some of their holiday visiting Neolithic burial chambers in the Isles of Scilly and Guernsey, so we have photographs and a report. Vince brings us into the 20th Century with an article on a World Heritage site. So this issue spans the Neolithic to today.

Arthur Langley

## 'Climate change is the fastest growing threat to world heritage sites.'

We are all becoming increasingly aware of the impact of climate change upon the planet but do we realise how many sensitive archaeological sites around the British Isles are at risk?

In July, a report compiled by Historic Environment Scotland on the impact of rising sea levels and coastal erosion in Orkney was presented at a UNESCO meeting in Baku. Neolithic Orkney is the first cultural World Heritage site to pilot this type of risk assessment, known as the Climate Vulnerability Index.

CVI examines vulnerability to climate change in two aspects: damage to the intrinsic cultural value of the site and impact on the local community. The workshop ranked the vulnerability for the Orkney World Heritage site at the highest level, with greatest risk from precipitation change, sea level change and storm intensity and frequency.

The site which is causing most concern is Skara Brea which the report identifies as being at acute risk of rising sea levels.

### What is the extent of the problem?

A charitable company known as the SCAPE Trust aims to research, conserve and promote the archaeology of Scotland's coast. SCAPE is interested in all archaeological sites and historic landscapes that have either a proximity to, or relationship with, the coast. SCAPE has identified 145 sites across the survey areas at greatest risk from coastal erosion. 31 of these sites have been assigned the highest priority status with the majority in them located in the Northern and Western Isles.

Coastal sites are not the only archaeological sites at risk. Stonehenge and Avebury for example could also come under threat from extreme weather conditions. Hotter, drier summers could result in a change to the plant species which help to fix the chalky soils, intense rainfall could bring flash flooding, whilst warmer winters could see an imbalance in the numbers of burrowing animals which could disturb archaeological deposits and destabilize the stones.

At Star Carr in Yorkshire the environmental conditions which led to the most extraordinary preservation of Mesolithic remains anywhere in the world is now under threat. Organic remains which had survived in the peat for 11,000 years are disappearing fast as the peat dries out. Changes to farming methods and the draining of the surrounding land have resulted in a rapid deterioration in the peat with any archaeological remains subject to significant biological decay.

Historic England has written a report which highlights some of the potential risks to our important heritage sites. Sadly it concludes that 'The planet's changing climate means that some archaeology which was relatively safely preserved under the ground is now at risk of damage due to extremes in temperature and cycles of wetting and drying. Because both buried archaeology and the conditions under which it survives are varied, there is not one single solution to environmental change.'

Janet Dickson

## Congresbury Mills

For centuries the water mills at Congresbury were a vital part of village life providing flour to make bread.

The West mill at Congresbury (where the new houses are down Mill Lane) and Iwood mill (just past Iwood bridge, on the right going north) can be traced back to at least 1086.

Prior to 1228 Iwood was a part of Congresbury manor. In 1228 Jocelyn, Bishop of Bath, granted Iwood to Stephen, his Chamberlain. This grant included 'a mill in Congresbury called the mill of Ywod'. Jocelyn also gave Stephen the mill at Congresbury.

The 1567 survey of Congresbury, among items 'belonging to the manor' records that

*'John Blewet Esquier and hys heires are bounden by theyr evidence whiche was shewed at this Survey to grynde all the Corne of the Lordes of the sayde Manor of Congresbury and theyr heyres allwayes frome tyme to tyme thence at theyer Mill Nowe Called the West Myll ffreely without paying of annything for the tolle thereof.'*

The Blewet family were still lords of Iwood at the time. This document establishes that the Congresbury mill was called



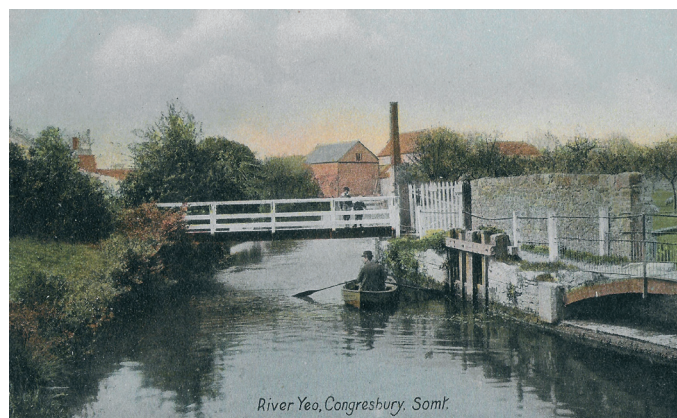
Iwood Mill c1890s

the West Mill before 1567 and was one of the two mills mentioned in Domesday.

During the 18th century the Congresbury (West) mill was surprisingly a slitting mill where iron bars were turned into rods for nail making.

Iwood mill was burnt to the ground in 1892 and never rebuilt. Thomas Sheppy & Sons, millers, moved to the north of Congresbury beside the main Bristol Road. (Now the housing estate Sheppy's Mill). They continued to trade from here until 1966.

The West mill in more recent times was known as Walter's mill being run by Hubert, Wally and Stanley Walter. The Walters sold the mill in 1962 and the site is now (you guessed it) a housing estate.



Walter's mill – early 20th century.

Both the Walters and Sheppys contributed a great deal to village life in addition to being major employers.

Nearly a thousand years of milling in the village has now disappeared along with the employment given by the millers to so many generations.

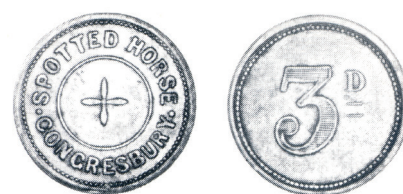
Chris Short

## Public House Tokens continued

This is a postscript to the article on pub tokens in the previous newsletter. I was looking at another book on Somerset Tokens in a section on pub tokens that had been discovered since the Pub Token book was published. I found a second token for Congresbury, a token for The Spotted Horse (now demolished for housing). There may be more out there still to be unearthed.

The illustration is from Tickets, Checks and Passes from the County of Somerset published by Somerset County Museum Service.

Dave Long



CONGRESBURY  
Obv - SPOTTED HORSE CONGRESBURY  
Rev - 3D  
Brass 27.6mm EP DY

### DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

OCTOBER - Friday October 4th Annual Social  
Congresbury Old School Rooms - 7.00pm for 7.30pm



## Porth Hellick Burial Chamber

The Isles of Scilly possess a number of burial chambers of an imposing design known as entrance graves. They comprise a chamber reached by means of a narrow low tunnel. Their particular design is found only on the Scillies and the west of Cornwall. They were constructed about 1500 BC by Neolithic farmers from Cornwall, at a time when the Isles were one single land mass. Most were situated on the uplands which surrounded the fertile lowlands, now beneath the sea.

The most imposing of the entrance graves is that at Porth Hellick on the island of St Mary's. It was part of a landscape comprising a scattered cemetery and six other mounds and two low cairns. When I visited however, in early summer, only the main chamber was visible above the bracken. It comprises a near circular mound about 12m in diameter and up to 1.6m high which is retained by a kerb of stone slabs. The mound is built around a stone-lined, roughly rectangular chamber about 3.5m long and up to 1.5m high which is roofed by four massive cap stones.



*Lower Innesidgen Burial Chamber and Mound*

The mound was excavated in 1899 but all contents had been robbed in antiquity. A similar mound excavated on St Martin's revealed the remains of over sixty individuals. Excavation had revealed that the graves had remained in use over a long period and as well as being a repository of bones and ashes could also have served as shrines or territorial markers.



*Inside the Upper Innesidgen Burial Chamber*

The site is an easy walk from St Mary's town and is an easy walk from another similar mound situated on the coast at Innesidgen.

**Peter English**

## Burial chambers on Guernsey

There are a number of Neolithic burial chambers on the Channel Islands, including this one on Guernsey at La Varde. This passage grave is the largest and most impressive, being built in the Neolithic period, c 4000 - 2500 BC and was in use until the Late Bronze Age, c 1000 BC.



*Entrance to burial chamber at La Varde*

The tomb is over 10 metres long and the huge capstone is over 10 tonnes. The uprights are graduated in size from the entrance to the rear: there is a small oval recess in the NW corner of the chamber. The site was discovered in 1811 when human skulls and bones were unearthed. F C Lukis excavated the site in 1837. He recorded two layers of paving, indicating successive periods of use, and between and above these layers were burnt and unburnt human bone.



*Inside burial chamber at La Varde*

Objects found in the grave include pottery, flint and stone tools. Complete pots and fragments of some 150 vessels were found dating from the Middle Neolithic to the early Bronze Age.

**Philippa Cormack**



## Vince's Corner –

*Jodrell Bank Observatory is now a World Heritage Site !*

It's as iconic and British as fish and chips, the Tower of London, or Doctor Who. Jodrell Bank.

The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) helps to protect some of the most important and iconic sites in the world by giving them World Heritage Site status. There are only (currently) 1121 of these on the entire planet. They include such sites as Babylon, The Great Barrier Reef, Machu Picchu and Great Zimbabwe.

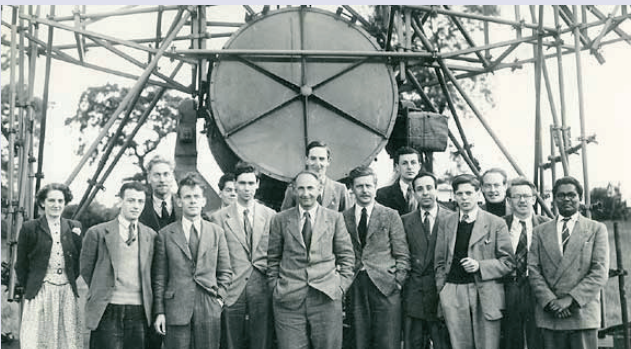
In Britain, such luminaries as The City of Bath, Stonehenge Avebury and their landscape, Ironbridge Gorge and the Jurassic coast in Dorset are WHSs: what is it about Jodrell Bank Observatory that allowed it to join such exalted company on 07 July this year?



*First observations with ex-military equipment at Jodrell Bank, in 1945*

This is simply 43 acres of Cheshire countryside where humanity's understanding of the universe changed for ever.

Previous to 1945, when Bernard Lovell and his team arrived at Jodrell Bank with some equipment borrowed from the military, in a lorry that immediately bogged down in the mud, virtually all astronomy had been visual (i.e. in the visible light spectrum). But visible light is only a small part of the electromagnetic spectrum, and it was work at Jodrell Bank that kicked off the whole field of radio astronomy, immediately finding a wealth of new objects and information at radio wavelengths.



*Jodrell Bank staff in 1951. Bernard Lovell is standing centre (both hands in pockets).*

The erection of the iconic Lovell radio telescope (see picture - a Grade I Listed Building incidentally), the largest steerable radio telescope in the world when built in 1957, and still the third largest, made much of this possible. Its very first project however, was to track the USSR's Sputnik, the first artificial satellite.



*The iconic Lovell radio telescope at Jodrell Bank, 2018. It is the same height as the Elizabeth Tower ('Big Ben') in Parliament Square, London.*

The Observatory has made substantial scientific impact in fields such as the study of meteors and the moon, the discovery of quasars, quantum optics and the tracking of spacecraft. Most recently, Jodrell Bank has been part of a worldwide radio astronomic study of two merging neutron stars 130 million light-years away, which merger had provided one of the first successfully detected bursts of gravitational waves.

As UNESCO puts it 'This exceptional technological ensemble illustrates the transition from traditional optical astronomy to radio astronomy (1940s to 1960s), which led to radical changes in the understanding of the Universe'. Although newer observatories like the Chandra X-ray telescope and the Hubble Space telescope (for example) have taken observatories into space, Jodrell Bank remains a world-leading research institute to this day.

You can find out more about this newest of WHSs and its impact on astronomy at [www.jodrellbank.manchester.ac.uk](http://www.jodrellbank.manchester.ac.uk).

**Vince Russett**

## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

*"Revealing the secrets of Yatton's past"*  
Friday 20th September 6.30-7.30pm Yatton Rugby Club, North End Road, Yatton, BS49 4AW;

This event is being run collaboratively by North Somerset Council and Wessex Archaeology and relates to the archaeological interventions undertaken as part of the Bloor Homes North End Phase 2.

The excavations have revealed nationally significant archaeology extending through the Bronze Age, Iron Age, Romano-British & post-Roman periods. The findings from these investigations show that the ridgeway that Yatton sits upon has been an important route for millennia, with evidence of metalworking and a significant cemetery site.