

# **PALAEO 2020: STRATEGIES FOR THE PROTECTION AND TRANSFORMATION OF THE PALAEOLITHIC RECORD IN ENGLAND**

## **A DISCUSSION MEETING TO BE HELD AT THE SOCIETY OF ANTIQUARIES**

Thursday May 19<sup>th</sup> 2016 10.00 – 19.00

It is now almost twenty years since John Wymer (1999) completed The English Rivers Palaeolithic Survey (TERPS) and the English Palaeolithic was reviewed (Gamble and Lawson 1996). The intervening period saw great advances in Palaeolithic archaeology and Quaternary Science and huge headway was made in getting adequate protection and mitigation of threats to the resource through local planning provision and developer-funded archaeology. These developments were consolidated and directed by two Palaeolithic research frameworks and underpinned by high quality field research in both academic and commercial spheres. But the progress made in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is now under threat in the current climate of austerity. Planning provision and expertise within local authorities are being dramatically eroded by cutbacks, research funding from traditional routes such as UK grant awarding bodies and Historic England are increasingly restricted. Within our own discipline the established pathways for career progression and the development of effective expertise are increasingly limited. This meeting seeks to address these urgent challenges as well as developing a new and radical approach to Palaeolithic research.

### **THE TERPS LEGACY**

The gains of the immediate post-TERPS period were considerable, seeing the growth of interdisciplinary projects focused on the British Palaeolithic, most notably *Ancient Human Occupation of Britain* (Stringer 2006; Ashton, Lewis, and Stringer 2011) and *Quaternary Archaeology and Environments of Jersey* (Scott et al. 2014). There has been a major survey of existing data (Pettitt and White 2012), two international exhibitions at the Natural History Museum (*Britain: One Million Years of the Human Story*) and the British Museum (*Ice Age Art: the arrival of the modern mind*), the Creswell Crags Museum and Visitor Centre opened with HLF support, and major reports on key sites which have transformed understanding of Lower, Middle and Upper Palaeolithic archaeology (Boismier, Gamble, and Coward 2012; Hosfield and Green 2013; Lewis and Rackham 2011; Parfitt et al. 2010; Wenban-Smith 2013). For much of the first decade of the century funding from the Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund drove protection, management and investigation of the Palaeolithic from fluvial sedimentary contexts.

### **THE CURRENT CHALLENGE**

But more recent changes in the funding and curatorial landscape: the resourcing of heritage protection and oversight of the commercial sector, have been rapid and have huge implications for the effective protection, management and investigation of the resource. The gains made in the post-TERPs era are under threat and the moment is therefore right for the Palaeolithic community to review current policy and to chart a bold forward strategy. With this purpose in mind this day meeting, hosted by the Society of Antiquaries, will bring together Palaeolithic archaeologists,

Quaternary Scientists, the archaeological commercial sector, Heritage curators and National Agencies.

[Heritage2020](#) provides us with a forward time-frame of five years in which to strategically develop new approaches and horizons for Palaeolithic research. Central to the discussion will be a focus on the key questions which faces this successful field of archaeology: “How can we protect what we do not understand?” and “how can we bring the unknown under better understanding?” A discussion of *Issues, Methods, Contexts and Strategies for Transformation* will be framed. This will be informed by the recently published *Lost Landscapes of Britain* volume (English Heritage 2015) and the associated archive report available on the Archaeological Data Service website (URL to follow).

Speakers will draw on the experience of both British and French fieldwork to address mutual challenges and share the methodologies proven to be useful in locating and recovering deeply buried sites. The agenda will consider how we develop consistent approaches to heritage protection across our increasingly fragmented patchwork of local author provision, how do we develop expertise and consistency in skills and how can we effectively scale-up our provision under a climate of increasing austerity. The full range of depositional environments will be examined, attempting to move beyond the persistent focus on fluvial contexts, and the samples we currently have critically examined for their representative character.

Central to the meeting will be how we can optimise the resources available to us to deliver a new, deeper understanding about our deep past while maintaining effective and consistent protection of the resource.

## Reading

- Ashton, N, S.G Lewis, and C Stringer, eds. 2011. *The ancient human occupation of Britain*. Amsterdam: Elsevier Developments in Quaternary Science 14.
- Boismier, W.A, C.S Gamble, and F Coward, eds. 2012. *Neanderthals among mammoths: excavations at Lynford Quarry, Norfolk*. London: English Heritage Monographs.
- Gamble, C.S, and A.J Lawson, eds. 1996. *The English Palaeolithic reviewed*. Salisbury: Trust for Wessex Archaeology.
- Hosfield, R., and C. P. Green, eds. 2013. *Quaternary history and palaeolithic archaeology in the Axe Valley at Broom, South West England*. Oxford: Oxbow.
- Lewis, J, and J Rackham. 2011. *Three Ways Wharf, Uxbridge: a Late glacial and Early Holocene hunter-gatherer site in the Colne valley*. London: Museum of London Archaeology.
- Parfitt, S.A , Nick M. Ashton, Simon G. Lewis, Richard L. Abel, G. Russell Coope, Mike H. Field, Rowena Gale, Peter G. Hoare, Nigel R. Larkin, Mark D. Lewis, Vassil Karloukovski, Barbara A. Maher, Sylvia M. Peglar, Richard C. Preece, John E. Whittaker, and Chris B. Stringer. 2010. Early Pleistocene human occupation at the edge of the boreal zone in northwest Europe. *Nature* 466:229-233.
- Pettitt, P.B. , and M.J. White. 2012. *The British Palaeolithic: Human Societies at the Edge of the Pleistocene World*. London: Routledge.
- Scott, B, M Bates, R Bates, C Conneller, M Pope, A Shaw, and G Smith. 2014. A new view from La Cotte de St Brelade, Jersey. *Antiquity* 88:13-29.
- Stringer, C. 2006. *Homo britannicus: the incredible story of human life in Britain*. London: Penguin.
- Wenban-Smith, F., ed. 2013. *The Ebbsfleet elephant: excavations at Southfleet Road, Swanscombe in advance of High Speed 1, 2003-04*. Oxford: Oxford Archaeology.
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