

STAFFORDSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

TALKS SEASON 2017-2018

REVISED DECEMBER 2017

23rd February 2018

Dr Richard Thomas

New Discoveries at Bradgate Park - Preliminary results from the Third Season of Excavation

Bradgate Park is located 10km north-west of the City of Leicester and covers an 830-acre recreational park which attracts c. 400,000 visitors each year. The landscape is designated as a SSSI and is described by Natural England as "one of the finest remaining examples of ancient parkland in Leicestershire" containing some of the "last remaining fragments of wet heathland in the County".

The park is first documented in 1241 (as a deer park) but is best known as the location of one of the first unfortified brick-built aristocratic houses in England (c. 1520), which was later the birth place and childhood home of Lady Jane Grey: the 'nine days queen'. Despite this historical significance, very little is known about the changing use of this landscape despite the richness of the archaeological evidence. The aim of the Bradgate Park Fieldschool is to better understand changing human interactions within this upland landscape, provide students with training in archaeology and promote public engagement.

Our third season of excavations concluded in July 2018 and included some major new discoveries: a late Mesolithic flint scatter, a Bronze Age enclosure and a revision of our understanding of Lady Jane Grey's home. In this talk, project co-director Dr. Richard Thomas will summarise the findings of the first three seasons of work and describe the plans for future seasons."

Richard read Ancient History and Archaeology at Birmingham University (1995-1998) and embarked on a PhD at Birmingham, studying diet, agriculture, and human-animal relations in late medieval and early modern England.

He joined the School as Lecturer in Archaeology in September 2003 and was promoted to Reader in 2014.

Teaching and research interests focus on the study of animal bones as a means of understanding past human-animal relationships (see the [Bone Laboratory](#) website).

Richard's research has two main strands:

1. the reconstruction of past human-animal relationships, predominantly in the historic period
2. palaeopathology – the study of animal health and disease in the past

9th March 2018

Andrew Fitzpatrick

In the footsteps of Caesar: The Archaeology of the First Roman Invasions of Britain

Andrew is a specialist in later prehistory joining Leicester University as Postdoctoral Research Associate in 2014 to lead the new Leverhulme funded research project which is the subject of the talk tonight. Andrew was previously at Wessex Archaeology.

23rd March 2018

Dr Keith Ray MBE

Dorstone Hill, Herefordshire: A Neolithic Landscape

The talk will focus upon the range of remarkable discoveries made across now seven seasons of excavation at the site from 2011. These include evidence for three of the earliest timber and daub aisled halls known from Britain, dating from around 3850-3800BC, with possibly also the earliest evidence for structural carpentry. A deep mortuary chamber has also been investigated, sited between two of the mounds; this was later covered by a mound, with a major human cremation pyre deposit subsequently laid along its ditch. The halls were burned down deliberately, and their remains were made to form the foundation for long earthen mounds; two of these mounds were stone-fronted and capped before all four mounds in a row were encased in a massive stone façade. This remarkable complex was then revisited and commemorative acts performed at it up to 600 years later. Meanwhile a causewayed enclosure was built on the hillside above the mounds, to enclose within its circuit of segmented banks and ditches a fourth mound, surviving intact today (but so far unexamined). The 'causewayed camp' is the principal target for excavation in 2017.

Keith Ray: began his archaeological career 47 years ago excavating at a massive Neolithic henge site near Dorchester in Dorset. Since then, he studied archaeology to postdoctoral level at the University of Cambridge, lectured in archaeology at the University of Nigeria, and

spent more than 25 years in conservation archaeology in Britain, working for universities and local government in Scotland, Wales, Oxfordshire, Plymouth and Herefordshire, where he was County Archaeologist from 1998 to 2014. He was awarded an MBE for services to archaeology and local government in Herefordshire in 2007. Currently a freelance heritage consultant, he also writes and edits books on archaeology and is Honorary Secretary for the Herefordshire Victoria County History. He is author of the books *The Archaeology of Herefordshire: An Exploration* (Logaston Press, 2015); lead author of *Offa's Dyke: Landscape and Hegemony in Eighth-Century Britain* (Windgather Press, 2016); and co-author of *Neolithic Britain: The Transformation of Social Worlds* (Oxford University Press, forthcoming – 2018).

6th April 2018

Sue Whitehouse

Saving Weavers' Cottages Kidderminster

The Weavers' Cottages in Kidderminster are a group of three 18th century artisans dwellings and the last surviving examples of their kind left in the town. They stood empty for over 40 years becoming increasingly derelict and unloved but many local people fought a hard campaign to save them because of their historic importance. Eventually they were saved at the 11th hour by the intervention of the Worcestershire Building Preservation Trust.

Sue Whitehouse is the Chairman of the Trust and will tell the story of how the building was saved and the remarkable histories that were revealed as the building works proceeded. She will also explain how building preservation trusts are able to take on dilapidated historic buildings which others walk away from and how their work is becoming increasingly important and challenging in the 21st century.

20th April 2018

Dr Gavin Speed

New Light on Ratae Corieltavorum

Recent archaeological discoveries in Leicester

Dr Gavin Speed is a Project Officer at University of Leicester Archaeological Unit (ULAS), he has over 15 years archaeological experience, having excavated on a range of archaeological projects both in the UK and abroad, he has

particular expertise in Iron Age settlements, and Late Roman / early Anglo-Saxon archaeology.

University of Leicester Archaeological Services has recently finished the largest archaeological excavation in Leicester in over a decade in advance of a major new development.

The excavation at 'Stibbe' has shed vivid new light on the city's Roman history, revealing evidence of luxurious dwellings including one of the biggest fragments of mosaic floor found in the city in 150 years. This talk reviews the recent and not-so-recent Roman discoveries from Roman Leicester, revealing much of the ancient Roman past.

4th May 2018

Dr Rob Ixer

NOTE: THIS TALK IS A 7.30pm START

Stonehenge and the Blue Stones

The precise number, identity, geological provenance and prehistorical significance of the various Stonehenge bluestones have been, and will always remain, contentious. Petrographical and geochemical re-examination of lithic assemblages collected during the last century, plus examination of all those from 21st century excavations, found within Stonehenge and its immediate environs (over 7000 samples) combined with dedicated, geological, *in situ* collecting has allowed a greater qualification and quantification of the rock types, demonstrated their relative archaeological 'importance' and suggested some of their possible origins. These data have shown that many earlier provenancing studies are incorrect whilst also uncovering cryptic questions including: -

- Why are some orthostats not represented in the abundant and spatially quite uniform Stonehenge 'debitage' ---and *vice versa*?
- Why are the geological origins of the non-dolerite bluestone so diverse and often from 'insignificant' outcrops for example the small outcrop of Craig Rhos-y-felin?

Can finding the geographical origin of the bluestones give us the transport route?

We shall never know why Stonehenge was built and rebuilt but might discover from whence.

Dr Rob Ixer FSA

Dr Rob Ixer was an economic geologist for 40 years before returning to archaeology. His interests are concentrated on early copper and bronze mining especially within the British Isles, Neolithic to Iron Age ceramics in Europe, Inka and Pre-Inka ceramics in the Andes and the geographical origin of almost any prehistoric lithic including all things Stonehenge. He writes many book reviews, some are quite good.