

Autumn Meeting 2018

Houses of the Dead

Organisers: Alistair Barclay, Jim Leary and David Field

10.30am-5.00pm Monday 5th November 2018

The Stevenson Lecture Theatre, the British Museum, London. **NB Please organise own refreshments on arrival and lunchtime: we only provide afternoon tea!**

10.00 Coffee (available for purchase in the outlets in the Great Court)

10.30 Welcome *Tim Darvill* and Introduction *Alistair Barclay, Jim Leary and David Field*

10.40 Hypogea and the clubhouse: Neolithic Malta's houses for the dead. *Caroline Malone*

11.00 Cicéron, c'est Poincaré *Philippe Chambon*

11.20 Mind the gap: comparing formal chronologies for the end of continental longhouses and the start of British and Irish halls and long barrows *Alasdair Whittle on behalf of Alex Bayliss, Lech Czerniak, Anthony Denaire, Philippe Lefranc, Arek Marciniak and Alasdair Whittle*

11.40 Houses of the living, houses of the dead - a view from the Polish lowlands *Joanna Pyzel*

12.00 The life and death of the longhouse: the story from the continent *Penny Bickle*

12.20 Houses of Dead Relatives? Patterns of ancestry and kinship in human remains from Early Neolithic monuments and caves *Tom Booth*

12.40 Measuring up – houses, enclosures, mounds. *Roy Loveday*

1.00 Lunch

2.00 Houses Foundational: Gathering Histories at Dorstone Hill, Herefordshire. *Keith Ray and Julian Thomas*

2.20 New work on long barrows in Lincolnshire -*Denise Drury and Tim Allen*

2.40 A Dialogue with the Dead? The relationship between an Early Neolithic house/hall and a tomb on Holy Island, Anglesey, Northwest Wales. *Jane Kenney*

3.00 Timber structures at Gwernvale and Dyffryn Lane, Powys. *Bill Britnell*

3.20 *Tea*

3.40 House of the living, house of the dead: an open and shut case from Ballyglass, Co. Mayo?

Jessica Smyth

4.00 Gone but not forgotten: uses for timber structures in Early Neolithic Ireland *Andrew Whitefield*

4.20 Kinnes revisited: Early Neolithic domestic and funerary structures in Scotland *Alison Sheridan*

4.40 Discussion *Frances Healy*

5.00 End

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Despite the chronological disjuncture, LBK longhouses have widely been considered to provide ancestral influence for both rectangular and trapezoidal long barrows and cairns, but with the discovery and excavation of more houses in recent times is it possible to observe evidence of more contemporary inspiration. What do the features found beneath long mounds tell us about this and to what extent do they represent domestic structures. Indeed, how can we distinguish between domestic houses or halls and those that may have been constructed for ritual purposes or ended up beneath mounds? Do so called 'mortuary enclosures' reflect ritual or domestic architecture and did side ditches always provide material for a mound or for building construction? This seminar will seek to explore the interface between structures often considered of the living with those often considered of the dead.

Long barrows are often considered as Houses of the Dead, yet many have no evidence of a funerary function. Recent excavations of a long barrow at Cat's Brain in Wiltshire encountered a mortuary enclosure almost identical in plan to that of a house excavated at Horton. No funerary evidence was present at either site. Is it time to reappraise the purpose of such features?



The Cat's Brain long barrow with internal feature – mortuary enclosure or house?

Caroline Malone (School of Natural and Built Sciences, Queen's University, Belfast)

Hypogea and the clubhouse: Neolithic Malta's houses for the dead.

Abstract:

Traditionally called "temples", the megalithic buildings of Neolithic Malta mirror the structure and form of contemporary subterranean burial complexes, the Hypogea. Recent work by the ERC FRAGSUS project has explored the structural elaboration that spanned about 1500 years, resulting in sophisticated forms of 'houses', designed for the living and the dead. Emerging from simple houses and rock cut tombs, the third millennium architectural culmination seen in the temple period sites of Malta is intriguing. Influenced by cosmology, the layout of sites reflected communal activities of feasting, food storage, symbolism and imply a close relationship between living and dead in the way houses were conceived in the minds of the Neolithic Maltese. This paper presents some of the new discoveries within a robust new chronology.

Philippe Chambon (Directeur de recherche CNRS)

Cicéron, c'est Poincaré

Abstract

To see graves as houses of the dead is a cliché in archaeology. One can even say it is a normal way of speaking, regarding the grave: we go to a cemetery to visit our (deceased) relatives. Apart from this figurative language, to what extent can the parallel be made? In the very case of the Neolithic, it is some times proposed that the first monumental constructions for the select or token chosen dead (ancestors) may replicate, not only houses of the living, but those of their ancestors. By good fortune, the first monuments are often elongated, as were houses of early agricultural communities in Central Europe.

The oldest monumental cemeteries are located in northern France with what is known as the Passy phenomenon, from the second quarter of the 5th millennium BC. The number of constructions, the typology of the monuments and the organisation of the cemeteries may vary but considering these complexes as a whole there is great similarity. Some of the monuments are trapezoidal, but there is a large range of variability in ground plan, from round to extreme elongation (more than 350 m).

Trapezoidal forms were also highlighted due to the superposition, at Balloy, of two (or three) monuments on the denuded remains of LBK houses, their ground plan obviously still present at the time. What seemed to be even more significant was the choice of Rubané houses instead of the Villeneuve-Saint-Germain type, perhaps as they were closer in time; that may suggest that the first farmers still held a special status in the ideology of the following communities. Unfortunately, 30 years after the Balloy excavation, this case of superposition remains unique. In fact, another case has been noted on the site of Vignely, but here the monument is much more recent (ca. 3800-3600 BC).

Hundreds of house plans are known from the early Neolithic, and the Balloy cases appear quite anecdotal in this context. Moreover, Passy type monuments and cemeteries have been discovered in areas where LBK settlements are scarce, like Normandy, or totally unknown, like the Bugey (east of Lyon). More generally, and simplistically the morphology of monuments can be reduced to simple

geometrical shapes: round, trapeze, rectangle. Symmetrically, houses occur in the same shapes - round or square - during Neolithic times... so?

Alex Bayliss, Lech Czerniak, Anthony Denaire, Philippe Lefranc, Arek Marciniak and Alasdair Whittle, presented by Alasdair Whittle (University of Cardiff)

Mind the gap: comparing formal chronologies for the end of continental longhouses and the start of British and Irish halls and long barrows

Abstract

Long barrows and cairns in Britain have been compared in the past to LBK longhouses. Those ended around the turn of the sixth millennium cal BC. Two studies from the recent ToTL project provide modelled estimates for the date of the eventual end of continental longhouse traditions. Those were in Alsace and the western Polish lowlands. In the former, the last longhouses probably belonged to the Rössen phase, which probably ended there in the 45th century cal BC. In the latter, late Lengyel longhouses persisted probably at least to the 40th century cal BC. Fuzzier chronologies elsewhere, including in the Paris basin, are noted in passing. Modelled date estimates are also given for halls or large houses in southern England, lowland Scotland, and in the 'house horizon' of Ireland. With the exception so far of White Horse Stone and Yarnton, the majority of these date no earlier than 3800 cal BC. Formal date estimates for long barrows are also briefly noted.

The implications of these chronologies for the possible linkage of house traditions to the emergence of monumental architecture in the form of long barrows and long cairns are discussed. Minimally, the argument for deliberate echoing of the LBK longhouse in long barrow form now has to incorporate an extremely long gap. Even the gap from Rössen to White Horse Stone is almost half a millennium, and the formal similarities are less close than formulated by for example Hodder and Childe. The Polish late Lengyel and British and Irish traditions probably overlapped, but again the formal similarities between house forms and monumental forms are much less close. The existence of very long-lasting oral traditions and myth cannot be discounted, but increasingly these chronological observations suggest that we may be better off investigating shorter chains of practice and memory, within the insular context.

Joanna Pyzel (Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, University of Gdańsk, ul. Bielańska 5, PL 80-851 Gdańsk)

Houses of the living, houses of the dead - a view from the Polish lowlands

Abstract

The Polish Lowlands are one of the very few regions where Neolithic monumental domestic (Danubian longhouses) as well as mortuary structures (TRB unchambered long barrows) have been discovered. Both have been investigated for a long time, however recent studies shed new light on their temporal relationship as well as architectural details and biographies of these constructions. This

presentation will give an overview of latest research on domestic and burial structures of the Early and Middle Neolithic in the Polish Lowlands which will provide a framework to discuss anew the transformation of houses of the living into houses of the dead.

Penny Bickle (University of York)

The life and death of the longhouse: the story from the continent

Abstract

As a counterpoint to the main theme of today's session, this paper considers LBK longhouses and associated ways of dealing with the dead. The aim is not to consider what ideas were passed on to neighbouring regions, but rather to explore how relationships between the living and dead have been modelled within the LBK itself. Two discussions are relevant here. First, the contrasting ways in which LBK burial- and house-archaeology are interpreted will be explored, asking whether they were part of a unified world-view or presented different conceptions of being and becoming. Second, I will discuss the 'end' of the longhouse as a way of life in central Europe, investigating how we can contextualise changes in both domestic and funerary architecture in order to understand the social changes at work across the Neolithic.

Tom Booth (Department of Earth Sciences, Natural History Museum, Cromwell Road, London, SW7 5BD)

Houses of Dead Relatives? Patterns of ancestry and kinship in human remains from Early Neolithic monuments and caves

Abstract

Detailed information on ancestry and kin relationships of the people who were interred in Early Neolithic funerary structures provides crucial context for understanding their origins and meanings. We analysed genome-wide data generated from six Mesolithic and 67 Neolithic human skeletons recovered from various dispersed British archaeological sites (including long barrows, megalithic tombs, caves and a causewayed enclosure). We found that ancestries of individuals from all site types were similar and that the development of Neolithic cultural practices was mostly driven by migrations of established farmers from various parts of northern continental Europe. British Neolithic populations were genetically more similar to Neolithic farmers from Iberia than Central Europe suggesting that they were largely descended from groups who had moved out of the Aegean and along the Mediterranean coast. Only a small proportion of British Neolithic ancestry was derived from Central European Neolithic populations associated with the LBK. Insofar as origins of peoples may shape cultural practices, these results suggest that British Neolithic structures are unlikely to be continuous with Mesolithic forms, and could have had diverse influences from across northern mainland Europe, but with only a small contribution from populations derived from the LBK. There was no evidence for close kin relationships in British Neolithic long barrows, tombs or indeed caves suggesting that these sites were probably not associated with particular biological families. By contrast, the three individuals recovered from the Whitehawk causewayed enclosure were probably siblings, suggesting that these monuments may have been associated with particular families.

Roy Loveday

Measuring up – houses, enclosures, mounds.

Abstract

In the plough eroded '2D' world of subsoil features how can we begin to distinguish Early Neolithic houses from funerary enclosures, and how do we know if the latter were ever freestanding monuments independent of long barrows? Given evidence for the structural use of turf from Dalladies to Therfield Heath, monumental mass cannot simply be reconstructed on the basis of ditch size, while elements of plans across the range of structures are likely to reflect shared origins in much earlier long house cosmology.

Dimensional and structural analysis perhaps holds out the best hope of secure differentiation but poses questions about the mechanism(s) underlying the broad numerical groupings that emerge. This paper will not attempt an unrealistic Thom-like reconstruction of Neolithic mensuration but will argue that the broad clustering of site sizes deserves our attention, both as an aid to classification and as a spur to explanation.

Keith Ray (Herefordshire Council) and **Julian Thomas** (University of Manchester)

Houses Foundational: Gathering Histories at Dorstone Hill, Herefordshire

Abstract

Debates about whether rectangular post-built, or post-and-slot, buildings dating to the first centuries of the fourth millennium BCE in Britain can be assigned a specific function on the basis of their scale and morphology are unlikely to prove fruitful. Likewise, arguments over whether the presence of 'special deposits' may signify ritual as opposed to domestic use of such structures will most probably also be at best inconclusive given the probable lack of distinction between these social spheres in the Neolithic. A preferable approach is to shift the focus of discussion onto the likelihood that sites with multiple buildings or individual longhouses represent places of gathering and (from time to time) dwelling, rather than stable settlements, let alone 'villages'.

In this talk, we present the evidence from Dorstone Hill, Herefordshire, for a sequence of different kinds of structures created at a single location over a period of four or five centuries: buildings, long mounds, and a causewayed enclosure. While there were clearly changes over this time, there were also significant strands of continuity in the way that these constructions were used. To some extent, this blurs the straightforward correspondence between form and function. At Dorstone, three architecturally distinct timber structures that had been arranged end to end were deliberately burned down, and their remains were purposefully then encapsulated within long mounds, again of markedly different character from one another, but all without flanking ditches. Moreover, they were associated also with remains suggesting differing traditions of mortuary practice. The causewayed enclosure that was later constructed adjacent to the buildings and mounds demonstrated striking continuities in both the artefacts represented and the practices in which they were employed. We conclude the presentation by briefly exploring some of the implications for our understanding of the Neolithic dead, and Neolithic history.

Denise Drury (Heritage Trust of Lincolnshire) **and Tim Allen** (Historic England)

New work on long barrows in Lincolnshire

Abstract

Historic England and Heritage Lincolnshire are currently assessing a number of long barrows on the Lincolnshire Wolds as part of a programme of work to help inform decisions on future protection and management needs of these assets. Approximately 100 barrows are being re-assessed using a combination of aerial photographic transcription, earthwork and geophysical survey: small-scale, sample, excavation is also being undertaken at a number of selected sites. This is the first coherent and intensive investigation of these monuments in a generation and the results will provide good detail on the current condition and extent of the monuments as well as throwing light on their constructional histories, landscape settings and related contexts.

Jane Kenney (Gwynedd Archaeological Trust)

A Dialogue with the Dead? The relationship between an Early Neolithic house/hall and a tomb on Holy Island, Anglesey, Northwest Wales

An Early Neolithic house/hall excavated in 2008 by Gwynedd Archaeological Trust at Parc Cybi just outside Holyhead was apparently aligned on the nearby Trefignath chambered tomb. This short paper looks at these two sites, both fully excavated, and considers the relationship between them.

Bill Britnell (Clwyd-Powys Archaeology Trust)

Timber structures at Gwernvale and Dyffryn Lane, Powys

Abstract

The timber structure found below the proximal end of the Cotswold-Severn tomb at Gwernvale near Crickhowell in the middle Usk valley during excavations in the 1970s is re-examined in the light of the distribution of ceramics and lithics, the recent study of associated cereal remains by Astrid Caseldine, and a new series of radiocarbon dates focusing on the 37th–36th centuries cal BC.

A timber structure at Dyffryn Lane near Berriew in the upper Severn valley, known from aerial photography and geophysical survey, appears to have parallels with a number of Scottish ‘timber halls’. It lies at one end of a recently identified cursus-like long enclosure with associated radiocarbon dates in the 39th–37th centuries cal BC and forms part of a complex of monuments examined by Alex Gibson, which include the Lower Luggy enclosure and long barrow and the Dyffryn Lane stone circle and henge monument.

Jessica Smyth (School of Archaeology, University College Dublin)

House of the living, house of the dead: an open and shut case from Ballyglass, Co. Mayo?

Abstract

One of a group of 30 court tombs forming a dense concentration on the carboniferous sandstones around Bunatrahir Bay in north Mayo, the Ballyglass court tomb (Ma.13) was excavated between 1969 and 1971 by Seán Ó Nualláin. During the first season of excavation, two postholes and short section of slot trench were uncovered close to the western gallery of the tomb. Subsequent seasons gradually revealed the footprint of a rectangular timber building, 13 m by 6 m, clearly underlying the cairn and kerb of the tomb. While evidence exists for timber settings beneath stone architecture in early 4th millennium BC Ireland, this extraordinary juxtaposition of what appears a ‘classic’ Early Neolithic house and a megalithic monument remains unparalleled. Is Ballyglass unique or a chance survival of a much more widespread practice? This paper reappraises the form, function and inter-relationship of these two buildings in their wider Early Neolithic context.

Andrew Whitefield (School of Geography & Archaeology, NUI Galway)

Gone but not forgotten: uses for timber structures in Early Neolithic Ireland

Abstract

At the turn of the 21st century, Ireland was in the midst of a housing boom. Record numbers of archaeologists were employed in development-led excavations. Remarkably, among the material thus uncovered was apparent evidence for a ‘boom’ (and bust) in property development almost six thousand years earlier. Excavations indicated that shortly after the turn of the fourth millennium BC, rectangular timber houses—some of them rather ostentatious—entered the architectural repertoire across the island. Now that the dust has settled, this paper investigates the extent to which the evidence from Early Neolithic rectangular timber structures coheres into a dependable classification of domestic architecture.

Prior to the identification of the Neolithic ‘boom’ the prevailing archaeological narrative determined that timber structures from the Neolithic should be seen as houses. This led Ian Kinnes to lament the ‘resistance of some Irish scholars’ to the idea of non-megalithic funerary practices during the Neolithic. The house narrative has hardened into a paradigm which sees straight-sided timber buildings as a signature component of the ‘settled’ agricultural landscapes of Early Neolithic Ireland.

This paper will examine the origins of the domestic paradigm in Ireland. With a focus on the west of Ireland, evidence old and new is used to test the paradigm. Alternative interpretations are proposed for certain Early Neolithic timber structures which challenge the characterisation of Neolithic landscapes organised around deceptively familiar substantial farmsteads. The link between some timber structures and Irish monuments in the European long cairn tradition forms part of the analysis.

Alison Sheridan (National Museum of Scotland)

Kinnes revisited: Early Neolithic domestic and funerary structures in Scotland

Abstract

The late Ian Kinnes’ work on non-megalithic long and round barrows in Britain between the 1970s and 1990s served to clarify the nature of the structures sealed under these mounds, and it is Ian that we have to thank for the concept of the ‘linear zone mortuary structure’. A quarter of a century on we

can now revisit the question of the extent to which funerary architecture echoes that of contemporary non-funerary architecture. This presentation will focus on Scotland, where there have been many valuable additions to our body of evidence since Kinnes wrote. In addition to reviewing the non-megalithic monuments, the presentation will also briefly consider megalithic monuments from Early, Middle and Late Neolithic Scotland, to see the degree to which these houses for the dead – these *Vessels for the Ancestors* (Sharples & Sheridan 1992, EUP) – echo the design of the houses for the living.

Frances Healy

Discussant