



# The Archaeological Journal

## Book Reviews



**BRONZE AGE CEREMONIAL ENCLOSURES AND CREMATION CEMETERY AT EYE KETTLEBY, LEICESTERSHIRE. THE DEVELOPMENT OF A PREHISTORIC LANDSCAPE.** By Neil Finn. Pp. 152, Illus 82. Leicester Archaeology, 2012. Price: £20.00. ISBN 978 0 956017 95 6.

The recent decline in the level of archaeological fieldwork, caused by the economic recession and the lack of development activity, may be a suitable occasion to reflect on some of the practices that emerged in the rapid expansion of investigation over the previous twenty years. Though there has been some discussion of fieldwork methods, debate about the means of publication has largely revolved around the problem of access to the 'grey literature'; much less has been said about the future of the traditional excavation report, a genre fixed since at least the time of Wheeler's *Maiden Castle* (1943). It is clear that not all fieldwork merits traditional publication, and nor would there be the outlets or the finance to support it — but the decision on what merits a monograph, and what its structure should be, is less clear.

The present volume is part of the output from fieldwork in advance of development at Eye Kettleby, near Melton Mowbray — the focus here is on the prehistoric remains, as the Anglo-Saxon and later evidence will be reported separately. The site was known for a deserted medieval village, and preliminary investigation revealed a major Anglo-Saxon complex. Geophysics and sample trenching failed to show anything recognizable as prehistoric; only a wider focus on the landscape through a large-scale strip, map and sample strategy showed scattered evidence for Neolithic activity, an important Bronze Age funerary complex, and settlement and a pit alignment of the Late Bronze Age. Perhaps the most important phase is the Early Bronze Age with a cluster of ditch-defined funerary monuments, two ring ditches and two D-shaped enclosures, reused for a cremation cemetery in the Middle Bronze Age; investigation was limited since much would be preserved *in situ* under a car park. There are serious implications for the effectiveness of fieldwork methodologies, but equally important was the dating strategy; a suite of no fewer than sixty-five radiocarbon dates, with the application of Bayesian statistics, allowed the production of a reliable chronology for the Bronze Age burials. Systematic use of radiocarbon dating should be a normal part of prehistoric excavation.

The report was originally structured in the traditional format, with a chronological account of the structural sequence followed by detailed specialist reports and a final discussion. This was then revised to integrate much of the detailed specialist reporting and analysis into the phase discussions, with technical material in appendices. This innovative format, now beginning to appear in other excavation reports, has some advantages: if, for example, you are interested in Early Bronze Age funerary structures

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you will find all the evidence and discussion assembled in one chapter. If, however, you have the misfortune to be a ceramic specialist, you will have to consult each chapter and the appendices (six separate sections) for a complete study. At this point you begin to wonder whether electronic publication, with appropriate hypertext links, is not a more suitable medium for the presentation of complex data than a traditional book with its linear constraints.

This is a well-produced and fully documented report; yet another excellent publication from the University of Leicester Archaeological Services, in traditional genre but with an innovative structure. It will make an important contribution to the prehistory, especially the Bronze Age, of the East Midlands, but it should also raise interesting questions, worthy of serious debate, about our established practices of fieldwork and publication.

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