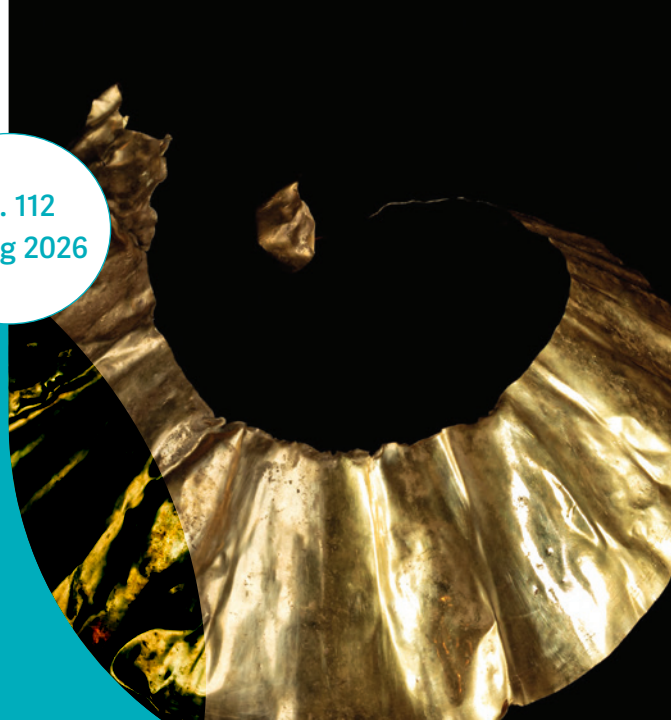


PAST

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE PREHISTORIC SOCIETY



Investigating a Bronze Age jet-worker's toolkit: the role of copper alloy awls in the manufacture of Early Bronze Age personal ornaments

In 2021, I embarked on an experimental project to replicate the Poltalloch spacer-plate necklace, excavated in 1928 from a cist at Poltalloch, Argyll, to hone my skills in working with a beautiful but notoriously challenging material – jet – and to better understand how it might have been worked in prehistory.

Jet is a type of fossilised wood, formed from multiple tree species in the *Araucariaceae* family, living in the Jurassic era around 180 million years ago. The only source of gemstone-quality jet in the UK can be found in the Whitby Mudstone Formation that runs along the Yorkshire coast between Staithes and Ravenscar. There are, however, several jet 'look-alikes' in Britain's geological landscape, including oil shale from Kimmeridge Bay in Dorset and cannel coals found across England and Scotland.

Worked jet and jet-like materials appear in the archaeological record around 5500 years ago, and include artefacts such as belt-sliders and large 'monster beads' that are exclusive to the British Neolithic. The arrival of new material technologies in the Early Bronze Age brought with it an increase in personal ornamentation. It is during this period that spacer-plate necklaces (and occasionally bracelets) appear; the plates allow the necklace to split into multiple strands. The majority of spacer-plate necklaces are made from jet or jet-like materials; however, two amber spacer-plate necklaces have been found in Britain and spacer-plate components are also known in bone, copper alloy and faience. Nearly two-thirds of spacer-plate necklaces have been found in Scotland and appear to be most common in the north-east of the country. Complete necklaces are rare, but small collections of beads and the occasional spacer-plate are more common.



Manufacturing stages of a fusiform jet bead (left to right: raw sea-washed jet specimen, a bead blank, a bead roughout and a finished bead)

© Emma Jones/AncientCraft



Perforations created in Kimmeridge shale bead blanks after five minutes of continuous drilling with left: a flint drill (1.8 mm at tip when drilling started); right: a copper alloy drill (1.8 mm) © Emma Jones/AncientCraft

Once I got to grips with working the soft yet brittle material, my questions turned towards how personal ornaments would have been manufactured in prehistory. Some experimental research on jet beads has been carried out in recent years by Alison Sheridan and Mary Davis in collaboration with Whitby jet-worker Hal Redvers-Jones. It is generally accepted that the manufacture of most ornaments would have progressed through three main stages: a roughout stage (including the creation of perforations if required), followed by a shaping stage, and finally a smoothing and polishing stage.

Prehistory is full of elusive characters, and the jet-worker is one of them. Very little is known about who they were, where they worked and what tools they used. When it comes to understanding how personal ornamentation from jet was made, we need to employ some investigative work and there are certainly clues that can be gleaned from studying and comparing the original beads.

For the roughout phase, it is likely that jet or jet-like materials would have been cut with flint saws. A certain amount of cutting and shaping would likely have taken place before the hole was drilled. The drilling is by far the trickiest and riskiest stage in the process. Flint, bone, copper and copper alloy have all been suggested as materials used for the drill bit. Drilling with flint is highly effective and often leaves a distinctive hour-glass-shaped perforation, but this is a far cry from the narrow uniform holes found on spacer-plate necklaces. Spacer-plate necklaces typically feature fusiform beads that are longer and biconical in profile. Hal has suggested that fusiform beads and spacer-plates would have been created using a metal-tipped drill bit. Meanwhile, examination of the perforations in Early Bronze Age jet artefacts shows a regularity to the drill marks, believed to indicate the use of a mechanical drill.

My most recent formal study explores the role of copper alloy awls in Bronze Age jet-working. Copper alloy awls have remained a relatively understudied tool type from the British

Bronze Age and have previously been attributed to tattooing, scarification, leather or gold working and, possibly, medical procedures.

Three main groups of awls have been identified, forming the foundation for my experimental work. My study tested a range of morphologies using copper and copper alloy awls in a controlled set of experiments to determine which were most effective in the mechanical drilling of jet. My findings, which will be published soon, have built a clearer understanding of how long an average-sized fusiform bead takes to drill with a metal drill and how much of the drill is lost during the drilling process, as well as identifying some of these artefacts as highly specialised craft tools.

While some artefacts are likely to have had multi-functional purpose, others have the potential to shed light on underrepresented individuals in prehistory (i.e. specialised craftspeople). Several awls have been found in graves with jet or jet-like personal ornamentation, and this work may help to identify new connections between them. I intend to use the reference collection of awls generated from this body of research in a subsequent microwear study, to compare use-wear marks against the awls from the archaeological record.

Experimental archaeology has grown as a discipline in recent years and, while experiments into drilling have been carried out, there is still much to be explored in the manufacture of jet and jet-like artefacts. Anyone who has tried making beads with prehistoric techniques will be fully aware that drilling spacer plates would have been the work of highly skilled craftspeople. The more time I spend working with these lustrous black materials and having the privilege to examine and compare the finished artefacts with their prehistoric counterparts, the deeper my respect for prehistoric craftspeople grows.

*Emma Jones (emma@ancientcraft.co.uk),
University of York*

From erratic to extraordinary: a response to ‘A Recumbent Stone Circle at Side Pike, Great Langdale, Cumbria, and related rock markings’ by Steve Dickinson

A recent article in PAST 111 (Autumn 2025) presented a series of claims concerning a supposed recumbent stone circle identified on the slopes of Side Pike, a mountain in Great Langdale, Cumbria. This enclosure – presumably dating to the Early Bronze Age, as per its typology – was said to be associated with a known rock art site in the adjacent field, as well as a newly discovered panel of rock carvings to the north. An extremely exciting find, if true. However, although the discovery of a recumbent stone circle in the Langdale Valley is *possible*, within the context of local archaeology, its implications would be extraordinary.

Great Langdale is recognised by prehistorians as a landscape of significant national archaeological value, primarily due to its numerous Early Neolithic stone axe production sites. These upland quarries are the origin for approximately one-quarter of all polished stone axes so-far found in England, and they have played a key role in the study of Neolithic landscape archaeology in Britain. Consequently, the identification of a recumbent stone circle, a style of megalithic enclosure primarily found in north-eastern Scotland, would be highly significant and requires close inspection.

A review of the site, recent drone photos, Lidar data, and the wider context of Cumbrian prehistoric monuments, suggests, however, that current evidence cannot support the interpretations presented.

Geographic doubt

The identification, in central Cumbria, of a 30 m wide ‘Recumbent Stone Circle’ immediately raised concerns, as this is a very distinctive site type. As noted, such monuments are confined to north-eastern Scotland, and some areas



The supposed recumbent stone (foreground). Note the number of nearby boulders in the same field.

of south-west Ireland. To propose such an enclosure in Cumbria, separated from its core distribution by hundreds of miles, requires very strong supporting evidence. In this case, however, such evidence is lacking.

The defining characteristic of a recumbent stone circle is a long horizontal ‘recumbent’ stone, closely set between two tall upright ‘flankers’, typically located in the south or south-west quadrant of the monument. Typically, the rest of the circumference of the circle is formed of well-spaced, tall megalithic stones, set on a level surface. The collection of stones identified on Side Pike do not conform to this morphology. The purported recumbent stone and its flankers are far apart: one approximately 15 m to the east, and the other 5 m to the west. Additionally, the alleged recumbent is



Drone image (taken Feb 2026) showing the two possible embanked enclosures from the air (a red feeding bucket can be seen in the centre of the lower enclosure). Further work is required to confirm if they are a) human made and b) their date, form and function.
© Robert Bewley

a relatively squat boulder, with its long axis oriented south-east, perpendicular to the perimeter of the supposed circle. This configuration separates it from most megaliths used in any type of stone circle, which generally have their long axes aligned along the circle's perimeter. For recumbent stones, this would be the sole exception.

The morphology of Neolithic circles in Cumbria is markedly different to the recumbent stone circles of north-eastern Scotland. Cumbrian circles, such as those at Castlerigg, Long Meg and Her Daughters, Gamelands, Elva Plain, and Swinside, are characterised by large stones and a wide diameter, often incorporating 'entrances'. With this in mind, it is noteworthy that the article did not discuss the alleged circle in this local morphological context, which is frequently referenced in theories related to the Langdale axe quarries, preferring to foreground a north-eastern Scottish connection.

Evidence would suggest these stones are not standing stones, but rather displaced volcanic boulders, or glacial erratics, which are characteristic of the area. These boulders are numerous on the slopes of Side Pike, including one that displays the adjacent 'Side Pike 1' rock art panel. Of course, without archaeological investigation into the footings of these stones, it remains impossible to know for certain that this is the case; but, from a landscape perspective, there is little to suggest these stones form a stone circle.

Lidar enclosures

Prior to the publication of the article, I shared Lidar imagery of the site with its author. This revealed two clear rectilinear earthworks underlying the alleged circle, each roughly 35 m across. Despite the implications of this, these enclosures were largely omitted from the article's claims. Of course, if these enclosures post-date the Bronze Age, it would be impossible for a recumbent stone circle to overlie them.

The morphology of the enclosures is consistent with a Romano-British or Iron Age upland settlement. In the glaciated landscapes of the inner Lakeland Fells, it is common to find 'cleared' stones gathered onto the banks of such enclosures. A good example of this is the Dovedale enclosure, where several large boulders appear to have been moved onto its embankment, creating what may be mistaken for a large stone circle. The 'earthen bank' described in the article, as well as the 'cobbed surface' described under the supposed recumbent stone, may be indicators of later phases of such upland land management. Additionally, the 'denuded' appearance of the supposed circle is possibly the result of later stone quarrying, or the remains of a collapsed field system, rather than the degradation of a Bronze Age ceremonial complex. Indeed, a survey of the site was conducted by the National Park Service prior to the article's publication, who concluded that it was likely *not* a stone circle.

Symbolic disconnect

Issues also exist in the attempt to link the Side Pike site to the Early Neolithic axe trade (c. 4000–3700 BC). Recumbent stone circles are a phenomenon of the late third to early second millennium BC, primarily associated with the Early Bronze Age and post-dating the axe quarries by approximately 1500 years.

Current research indicates that there is no substantive evidence to demonstrate that Bronze Age people constructed monuments with the purpose of establishing a 'direct line of sight' to Neolithic industrial sites, such as the Langdale quarries, which are believed to have ceased major activity by approximately 3200 BC. Notably, the only documented Bronze Age stone circle in Great Langdale – Whorneyside Ring Cairn – does not orient towards the Langdale Pikes. Therefore, intervisibility with the Langdale Pikes is more



Drone photograph of the Iron Age 'Dovedale enclosure'. Note how boulders were moved onto the outer embankment.



Side Pike 1 rock art

plausibly attributed to relative topography, rather than any deliberate ritual association. Indeed, due to their prominent size and location, the Langdale Pikes are visible from much of south Lakeland.

Cups or cupules

The authenticity of the previously identified rock art panel, Side Pike 1, is well established; it is positioned beneath another potential cup and ring mark at the summit of the same mountain. By contrast, the recently reported rock art (Side Pike 2) could be interpreted as cupules; naturally

occurring depressions in volcanic rock frequently found throughout the Great Langdale Valley.

Additionally, the paper attributes the 35 cup-marks on Side Pike 1 to the Pleiades asterism and a 'moon indicator'. Such suggestions may have merit, and it is impossible to prove such theories otherwise. However, the article draws parallels between this rock art site and the Nebra Sky Disc: a portable mid-Bronze Age metal object from Germany (c. 1800–1600 BC), and overlooks the archaeological context of rock art within the Cumbrian Fells. The author's assertion that Side Pike 1 pre-dates the Nebra Disc, based on its proximity to Neolithic quarries, also lacks any foundation.

Conclusion

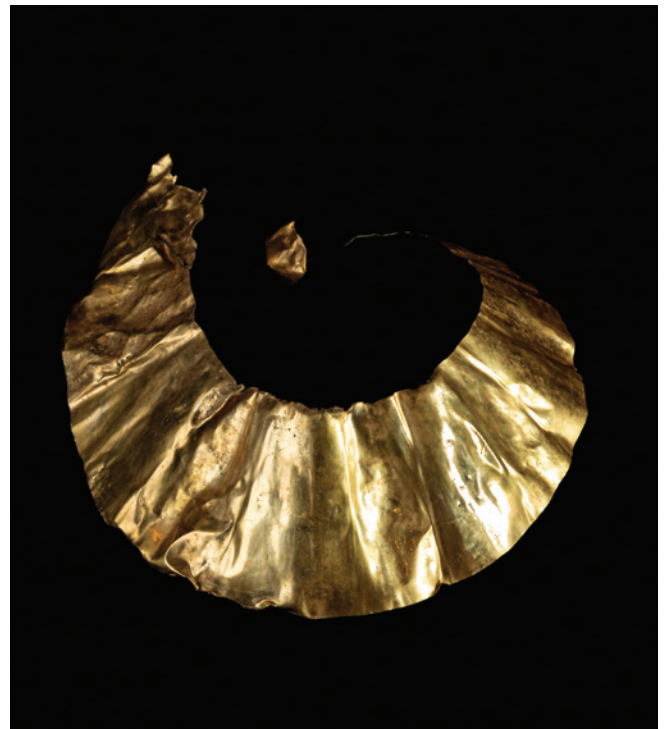
While the potential discovery of new Neolithic ritual enclosures is always of interest, such claims *must* be grounded in local context. Under scrutiny, the evidence at Side Pike does not support the existence of a recumbent stone circle, nor does it provide a link between the Neolithic axe industry or north-east Scotland. This research has, however, led to the possible discovery of one (maybe two) small embanked enclosures.

*Adam M Ibbotson (adamibbo789@outlook.com),
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A Bronze Age lunula from Grassington in the Yorkshire Dales

The Yorkshire Dales, in North Yorkshire, is an upland region of northern England famous for its limestone geology, sheep farming, and honeypot villages that attract walkers and tourists. It is, however, an area that has often been overlooked by archaeologists due to the rich prehistoric legacy of neighbouring East Yorkshire and Cumbria. Much of what is known about prehistory in the Yorkshire Dales is based on scatters of flint and chert tools found in molehills; human remains, ceramic sherds, and flintwork from numerous caves and potholes; and from fieldwork carried out by local historical groups. So-called 'prestige' objects representing the products of skilled craftsmanship are rare, but those that do exist take the form of stone and antler maceheads, an archery bracer, several polished stone axes, a ripple-flaked arrowhead and an All Over Cord Beaker.

The discovery of an Early Bronze Age lunula, or crescentic gold neck ornament, by a metal detectorist in a field close to the River Wharfe, near Grassington, has therefore come as somewhat of a surprise. Dating to the period 2400–2000 BC, the artefact was found in a stream bank. Given that the soils in the area are thin, often waterlogged, and usually overlie limestone bedrock close to the surface, the most reasonable explanation for its place of discovery is that millennia of bank erosion by the stream has exposed the original depositional site, eventually washing the lunula out.



The Grassington lunula © North Yorkshire Council



Detail of faint incised decoration on lunula and terminal © North Yorkshire Council

When found, the lunula was rolled up, and missing one terminal. A diligent search failed to recover the other terminal, leaving the possibility that it only had a single terminal when deposited. Unfamiliar with this artefact type, the lunula was unrolled by the finder, unfortunately detaching the remaining terminal in the process. This second terminal has, however, been safely retained.

The lunula measures 180 mm long and 170 mm wide. The gold sheet is about 0.25 mm thick and the total weight of the band and terminal end is 79.3 g. The lunula appears asymmetrical in shape, which may have been intentional during manufacture or, perhaps more likely, distortion has occurred due to the weight of soil acting on it following deposition or rolling the artefact up for deposition.

Decoration on the upper surface of the lunula is very slight but comprises five faint incised lines forming a border along the lower edge. Areas of cross hatching create a ladder pattern, along with two very faint incised zig-zag lines. The central zone of the lunula is partially undecorated. Decoration on the terminal end is better preserved and comprises double incised lines forming a border flanked by chevrons on both sides. This pattern is repeated in two straight registers and aligned on the shaft of the terminal.

The faint appearance of the decoration seems to have resulted from wear. This could be the result of intentional erasing of the motifs, perhaps in order to 'decommission' the object prior to deposition, or simply to remove its identifying features. Whatever the reason, the lunula was placed in a location that has probably always been subject to waterlogging after heavy rain, which may also have contributed to the artefact's worn appearance.

Not only is the findspot close to a stream and a major river (Wharfe), but it is also close to what was formerly a glacial lake flat known as Linton Mires. Although now benefitting from modern drainage works, water flowing downhill after heavy rain into Linton Mires would formerly have been held back by a ridge of glacial till. This would have slowed dispersal of the water, giving rise to an ebbing and flowing peaty wetland. Even today, the area can flood, closing a minor road until the water subsides.

At a bend in the River Wharfe at Linton, a stream emerges from a hillside where the limestone meets shale and gritstone, marking the site of the geological feature known as the Craven Fault. A short distance back up river from this point, is Linton Falls. It is possible that any, or all, of these natural phenomena held symbolic or ritual meaning for the Early Bronze Age people who deposited the lunula in this landscape. Some parallels in depositional context can be drawn with Irish lunulae, many having been found in bogs, and some similarly found rolled up.

The next exciting stage of research for the Grassington lunula is to provenance the gold, and arrangements to do this are now in progress. It is hoped that the results will shed new light on the nature of mobility, networks, and long-distance movement of artefacts and raw materials across the Yorkshire Dales and beyond.

The lunula is currently on display at Craven Museum, Skipton.

*Debbie Hallam (Debbie.hallam@btopenworld.com),
independent researcher*

Struck quartz and recovery practice: evidence from four Scottish excavations

Introduction

Since 1996, the lead author has worked in Scottish and English commercial archaeology where lithic assemblages recovered through development-led excavation were overwhelmingly dominated by flint, while struck quartz was rarely recorded. Recovery typically followed mechanical stripping and evaluation trenching, with lithics often identified in spoil rather than in secure contexts. In 15 years of excavation, only one lithic scatter was discovered which yielded no struck quartz. Nevertheless, reflecting prevailing industry assumptions, the existence of struck quartz was accepted but regarded as rare.

After moving to local authority archaeology in 2010, researched excavations were undertaken using hand excavation through topsoil with community volunteers. These volunteers did not necessarily share commercial assumptions about what constituted an artefact and frequently recovered distinctive quartz pieces. This drew attention to the frequency of quartz in the topsoil: it was recovered in notable quantities and specialist examination confirmed that much of it was struck. This prompted the question of whether these sites were unusually rich in quartz lithics, or whether such material had simply not been recognised elsewhere.

Methodology

From 2024, excavation methodology was revised to test these observations, with *all* quartz and flint recovered across four sites: Huntly, Aberdeenshire, an Early Iron Age to Early Medieval hillfort; Fintry, Stirlingshire, a Post-Medieval

village; Spittal Hill, Stirling, an 18th century roadside trench; and Balfron, Stirlingshire, a suspected motte. Material was washed and triaged to remove non-quartz and non-flint stones, along with pieces lacking percussion features or those smaller than a thumbnail, resulting in the discard of approximately 50% of the assemblage. The retained material was examined by a lithic specialist and a further 30% excluded as non-archaeological, leaving predominantly struck quartz cores and debitage. On the basis of specialist examination, the majority of the assemblage is provisionally attributed to the Late Bronze Age or Early Iron Age.

Site	Total Lithics	Trench size	Quartz	Flint
Battle Hill	28	12 m x 1 m	24	4
Fintry	58	19 1 m x 1 m test-pits	57	1
Spittal Hill	108	15 m x 2 m	107	1
Balfron	82	15 m x 2 m	82	0

Site totals of recovered lithics (quartz and flint)

Across all sites struck quartz predominated. Where quartz and flint occurred together, quartz substantially outnumbered flint and at Balfron no flint was recovered. Quartz dominance across sites of differing character and chronology indicates that its occurrence is not confined to any particular site type. The minimal presence of flint at three sites suggests that without deliberate quartz retention, lithic activity may be significantly underrepresented in standard assemblages. The Fintry excavation also demonstrated clustering rather than uniform distribution, implying discrete areas of struck quartz activity.



Test-pitting at Fintry, Stirlingshire



A handful of struck quartz

Comparative museum data

To contextualise these findings, Scottish Treasure Trove records for excavated assemblages submitted in 2014–2024 to Aberdeen University Museum and the Stirling Smith Museum and Art Gallery were reviewed. During this period, only 6 pieces of quartz were submitted to Stirling and 43 to Aberdeen, whereas museum catalogues and associated site reports recorded 14,461 non-quartz lithics. This disparity implies that struck quartz is consistently underrepresented within typical development-led assemblages.

Discussion

If flint recovery rates are taken as a proxy for lithic visibility within standard excavation practice, then the 14,461 lithics recorded from Aberdeenshire are unlikely to represent the

full extent of original lithic assemblages. Extrapolation suggests that struck quartz may have been present in far greater numbers, potentially exceeding 83,000 pieces (although this estimate must be treated cautiously). Even allowing for uncertainty, the discrepancy indicates that recovery practice can significantly influence assemblage composition. Within the limited sample presented here, the predominance of struck quartz suggests that its absence from wider Scottish excavations may reflect differences in recovery and recognition rather than genuine absence.

These findings suggest that recovery methodology through topsoil is a key factor. Quartz often lacks the visual clarity of flint and is more easily overlooked during rapid or mechanical excavation. Recovery is shaped by field procedure, and the experience of community-led excavation demonstrates that differences in expectation and attentiveness can materially influence outcomes.

Conclusion

Although this is a limited study, a clear pattern has emerged linking the recovery of struck quartz to excavation and recovery practice that warrants further investigation. Where quartz is deliberately retained and examined, it represents a consistent and sometimes predominant lithic component within prehistoric and early historic contexts. The restricted presence of struck quartz within many development-led assemblages may therefore reflect recovery practice rather than the original composition of the lithic assemblage as a whole. Even modest adjustments in field procedure may have cumulative effects on lithic datasets. Routine retention with specialist assessment of visible quartz provides a practical means of more accurately recognising and recording lithic assemblages at excavated sites.

Murray Cook (m.j.cookstirling35@gmail.com),
Torben Ballin, Lindy McNair and Dominic Farrugia,
independent researchers

Notice of AGM and Europa conference 2026

We will be holding our 2026 AGM at 4.30pm on Saturday 6th June, as part of our Europa conference at the University of York, which is a hybrid event. An agenda and papers will be available from the website in advance.



This year's Europa conference *What can we learn from Neanderthals?* celebrates the achievements of Prof. Penny Spikins in the field of early prehistory. The full programme is forthcoming, with confirmed speakers including Prof. Chris Stringer (Natural History Museum), Dr Silvia Bello (Natural History Museum), Dr Matt Pope (University College London) and Dr Jennifer French (archaeological consultant).

More information and booking is available at: <https://www.prehistoricsociety.org/events/2026-06-06>.

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2024

	2024	2023
	£	£
Income		
Income from donations and subscriptions	40,466	39,163
Income from charitable activities:		
Grants	–	2,000
Conferences and education days	6,834	11,040
Royalties and commissions	12,946	19,700
Investment income	5,823	5,139
Total income	66,069	77,042
Expenditure		
Expenditure on charitable activities:		
Grants	7,769	7,511
Lectures	721	517
Proceedings	27,305	22,263
PAST	15,932	900
Research Papers	1,500	6,334
Conference and meeting costs	14,408	19,221
Administration and governance	22,989	16,581
Total expenditure	90,624	73,327
Net income/ (expenditure)	(24,555)	3,715
Total cash funds at 1 January	46,989	43,274
Cash profit/(loss)	(24,555)	3,715
Total funds at 31 December	22,434	46,989

The Statement of Financial Activities is an extract from the full accounts of the Society. Copies of the full accounts for 2024 are available on the website or can be obtained from Tessa Machling at the registered office.

Report of the Treasurer

The Society's accounts remain on a sound footing, and our membership income continues to demonstrate the enduring commitment of our members, with income from donations and subscriptions rising to £40,466 (2023: £39,163). Investment income also increased to £5,823 (2023: £5,139). Our reserves remain healthy with an increased proportion easily accessible. Members should note that the 2023 comparative figures in these accounts differ from those published in last year's abridged accounts, as the Society has converted to a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO), which requires a different form of accounts. The 2023 figures have been restated accordingly.

The overall deficit of £24,555 (2023: surplus £3,715) is largely explained by a timing factor in publication costs. PAST

production costs were £15,932 (2023: £900), reflecting two sets of invoices falling within the same financial year rather than one: a straightforward invoicing matter, and not a cause for concern. The Society also maintained its commitment to supporting the research community, with grants totalling £7,769 (2023: £7,511).

Royalties and commissions from Cambridge University Press were £12,946 (2023: £19,700), and conference and education income was £6,834 (2023: £11,040), in line with the programme delivered. The Trustees are confident in the Society's long-term position and will continue to manage expenditure carefully to protect reserves and sustain the publications programme in the years ahead.

The Prehistoric Society 2025

This report covers the period of January to December 2025.

The Society completed the process of changing status from being both a charitable company and a charity, to a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO). The governing body is now the Board of Trustees, and we are solely regulated by the Charity Commission. The Trustees continue to consider how to ensure the Society remains financially viable, so we can operate for generations to come.

Personnel changes

Linda Hurcombe stepped down as President, and we welcomed Robert Bewley as our incoming President. Felicity McDowell stepped down as Meetings Secretary and the role has been jointly taken on by Adelle Bricking and George Prew-Stell.

Lectures, meetings and study tours

The Society continues to fulfil its commitment to reach a wide range of regional audiences and to promote its aims and objectives through varied lectures, conferences, and day schools. In April 2025, we held the third day school in our series *Prehistory: Past, Present and Future*. In 2023, we looked to the past, in 2024 we looked at what is happening in the present in the discipline, and for the final day school in the series the topic was the future of prehistory. The event was held online, which allowed us to reach a diverse audience and to gain good attendance numbers.

We have continued to collaborate with colleagues in other archaeological bodies and societies. During the year, we hosted joint lectures with Cornwall Archaeological Society, Welwyn Archaeological Society, London and Middlesex Archaeological Society, Leeds City Museum, Yorkshire Historical and Archaeological Society, and the Leicestershire Fieldworkers.

Financial support was offered to the *Maiden Castle: 40 Years On* conference, organised by the Dorchester Association, and to the Iron Age Dialogues and NEBARSS conferences.

The Sara Champion lecture was delivered by Dr Barbara Oosterwijk, who presented a fascinating talk entitled *Traces of touch: from Palaeolithic embodied markings to Amazonian decorated hands* at the Society of Antiquaries of London.

Dr Sam Challis presented a talk in our Global Past lecture series entitled *Prehistoric peoples' history: colonisation as seen through indigenous eyes in the rock art of southern Africa*. Completely free and open to everyone, and hosted on Zoom through the winter, the series continues to offer both members and the public a glimpse of the archaeology of every continent.

Europa Prize

This year's Europa prize recipient was Martin Bell, Professor of Archaeological Science at the University of Reading. The Europa conference held in his honour at the University of Reading explored the topic of landscape connectivity in prehistory, and was a hybrid event attended by 87 people in person and 14 online.

President's Awards



Dr Guy Schofield receiving the President's Award from Dr Robert Bewley

The President's Awards were given to two artists working to bring the prehistoric world alive through visual media. Tom Björklund was recognised (in absentia) for his beautiful reconstructions of prehistoric life, which challenge us to see the people behind the finds. By sharing his work across multiple social media platforms, these stunning images are accessible across the world. Dr Guy Schofield was also recognised for the immersive digital mural that he created for the *Life After the Ice* exhibition that opened in March 2024 at the Yorkshire Museum. Guy's mural depicted the Mesolithic site of Star Carr. Constantly changing through day to night, with the seasons and with different weather conditions, his work successfully engaged a whole new audience in the world of Star Carr.

Peter Clark Award



Jacqueline McKinley receiving the Peter Clark Award from Prehistoric Society President Dr Robert Bewley

The Peter Clark Award was presented to Jacqueline McKinley of Wessex Archaeology, in recognition of her outstanding contribution to the study of human remains. Jacqueline was a founding member of the British Association for Biological Anthropology and Osteology (BABAO), and is known for her theoretically-sophisticated work in understanding the ritual intricacies of Bronze Age cremation practices. She has made significant methodological contributions to the study of cremated bone, and advised on the development of legal and best-practice guidelines for the excavation and post-excavation treatment of human remains.

Research Grants

Research grants (together totalling £5197) were awarded to the following recipients: Ina Berg, to assist with travel expenses associated with studying the Knossos clay tablets; Dirk Brandherm (the Dyer Prize) for work at Brusselstown Ring hillfort in Ireland; Tom Clare (the Grinsell Prize), for osteological analysis of remains from Sizergh Fell, Cumbria; and Ravindra Devra (the Bob Smith Prize), for fieldwork in the Thar Desert, Rajasthan.

Grants were awarded under the Conference Fund to Ivana Jovanovic and Kelly Reed, to assist with travel to the *Emergence of the Neolithic in Europe* conference in Zadar, Croatia.

Finally, funding for SUERC radiocarbon dates was awarded to Nyree Finlay, to assist with dating material from Clachbreck in western Scotland.

The Annual General Meeting for 2025

The 2025 AGM was held as part of the Europa conference in Reading. The President reported on another successful year, providing details of the Society's core activities, publications, lectures, and conferences. A formal vote was taken to approve the move to becoming a CIO and to approve the new constitution of *The Prehistoric Society*.

The President thanked all Council and members who have assisted with events during the year.

The following officers and members of Council* were elected and re-elected:

President	Dr Robert Bewley
Vice-Presidents	Dr Rachel Pope, Dr Rob Hosfield, Dr Rupert Housley
Treasurer	Dr Lisa-Elen Meyering
Secretary	Dr Meredith Laing
Editors of PPS	Dr Daniela Hofmann (editor in chief), Dr Susan Greaney, Dr Courtney Nimura
Editor PAST	Dr Lindsey Büster
Editor, Prehistoric Society Research Papers Series	vacant
Book Reviews Editor	Dr Helen Chittock
Meetings Secretaries	Dr Adelle Bricking and Dr George Prew-Stell
Conservation Co-Ordinator	Dr George Prew-Stell
Council	Dr Jess Bates, Dr Oliver Davis, Dr Susan Greaney, Dr Jennifer Wexler, Dr George Prew-Stell, Dr Adelle Bricking

*Since the transition to CIO, there is no longer a Council. Instead, *The Prehistoric Society* has a Board of Trustees. At the end of 2025 those were: Robert Bewley, Rupert Housley, Rachel Pope, Rob Hosfield, Lisa-Elen Meyering, Meredith Laing, Adelle Bricking, George Prew-Stell, Oliver Davis, Jess Bates and Jennifer Wexler.

Publications

Volume 90 of the *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society* was delayed but sent out in 2025. This was Julie Gardiner's last volume. From volume 91, the new editorial team will be in charge. As usual, three editions of *PAST*, the Society's newsletter, were published under the editorship of Susan Greaney and subsequently, Lindsey Büster.

Membership and administration

Membership is healthy, although more members are always welcome. Our online and social media presence continues to grow steadily.

As ever, the Society would not be able to function without a large number of individuals giving freely of their time and knowledge to organise events and to deliver the results of their fieldwork and research. The Society offers sincere thanks to all those who have helped throughout the year, and especially to its Administrator, Tessa Machling.

Undergraduate Dissertation Prize



Archie Robson being presented with the Undergraduate Dissertation Prize by President Dr Robert Bewley



Undergraduate Dissertation Prize runner-up Juniper Little with President Dr Robert Bewley



Undergraduate Dissertation Prize runner-up Evan Grandidge de Paz with President Dr Robert Bewley

Each year *The Prehistoric Society* awards a prize to an undergraduate dissertation that has made the greatest contribution to the study of prehistory in any part of the world. The 2025 award was given to Archie Robson (Durham University) for *A lost art? Digital and experimental investigation of a Mesolithic engraved stone assemblage from Rhuddlan, Denbighshire, UK*.

We also had two very strong runners up: Juniper Little (University of Leicester) for a dissertation titled *Landscape, labour and feasting at Alfred's Castle* and Evan Grandidge de Paz (University of Cambridge) for a dissertation titled *Unravelling Pacatnamú: textiles, relationality and agency at a Late Intermediate Period site, Peru*. Congratulations to Archie, Juniper and Evan on their excellent research.

The prize represents an excellent opportunity for outstanding young scholars to have their work publicly recognised. The winner of the prize receives three years' free membership of the Society, the choice of one of the Society's in-print

monographs and £100. An abridged version of the successful dissertation is also considered for publication in the Proceedings.

We are now looking for nominations for the 2026 awards. This prestigious prize is open to any student nominated by their university in Britain and Ireland. Each department is invited to submit one dissertation by a candidate who completes their degree during the 2025–2026 academic year. The judges will assess entries based on the quality of work, the originality of the approach and the degree to which the research advances our understanding of prehistory.

Entries should be sent as a single PDF by the nominated staff representative to admin@prehistoricsociety.org by 18th July 2026 (please note: we will not accept entries directly from students). The file name should comprise the student's name and institution. Entries can only be accepted if accompanied by the email address, postal address and contact phone number for the candidate and their supervisor.

NOTICE FOR MA STUDENTS WANTING TO PUBLISH IN THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE PREHISTORIC SOCIETY

We would encourage supervisors of particularly promising Masters students to guide their students through writing an article based on their research for submission to the *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society*. Please contact the editors early (editors@prehistoricsociety.org) regarding the suitability of the piece, reworking guidelines, and possible editorial help for early career submissions.

Peopling the past: reflections from Tom Björklund on receiving The Prehistoric Society President's Award 2025



Before the internet, it was not easy for an artist to reach a larger audience. For decades, I worked on a modest scale for people I knew and for a few museums and publishers. When the internet and social media platforms became more widely available, the situation changed drastically. About 10 years ago, interesting articles based on new breakthroughs in DNA research started to appear. Inspired by a study that suggested that Neanderthals were possibly as diverse as modern humans, I made a Facebook post that contained various portraits of people with Neanderthal features. I had no idea how impactful it would be. From being followed mostly by friends and relatives, I gained thousands of new followers literally overnight. I also received a kind invitation from Dr Tessa Mächling to join *The Prehistoric Society's* Facebook group, which I believe I can thank for the sudden popularity of my posts.

While illustrations, even when described as 'scientific', may not contribute much to the research itself, visual representations are indispensable when it comes to popularising research results, not least when depicting human origins and our physical and cultural evolution. Text and words require us to concentrate on what we are reading for a good while, but the content of an image can be grasped immediately. Moreover, it is often the images that are etched in our memory for a long time. This involves a great responsibility. In a text, one can describe different alternatives and use words like 'maybe' and 'possibly' in a way that does not undermine credibility. An image, on the other hand, must be either one or the other; it is not possible to present many variations at the same time, at least if the scene that is depicted is expected to look reasonably natural.

Regardless of new revolutionary methods, a visual reconstruction of a specific event or person who lived a long time ago is always a subjective interpretation. Facts are still

scarce and a lot of imagination is needed to create a full picture. Fortunately, most people understand that the main purpose is to provide food for thought and do not expect the image to represent an absolute truth in every detail. One might think that imagining and illustrating what people looked like and how they lived thousands of years ago is a fairly harmless activity. However, it has turned out that many topics concerning our ancient past are now as politically and ideologically inflammable as they ever were before. That researchers are harassed because of their work is once again a sadly common occurrence, and scientific illustrators get their fair share of it. In a world in turmoil, it is easy to think that there are more important things to do than digging up old artefacts and trying to figure out what they meant to the people who made them, and definitely more urgent matters to deal with than imagining the past and creating paintings about it. But then again, following our innate curiosity that has led to what we call science and creating art in its various



forms is the exact thing that has made us what we are, for better or worse.

The responsibility and dilemma lie in remaining honest while at the same time avoiding that new findings and communicating them to the public can be distorted to achieve various political goals and doing harm in the process. Staying neutral when assessing and interpreting scientific results is a challenge for both scientists and artists. It is not unusual to see headlines announcing that everything we thought we knew about human prehistory must be rewritten based on new findings, often somehow suggesting that the public has been previously lied to, for some murky reason. It is certainly true that the gaps in our knowledge are frequently filled with new information, sometimes seemingly overthrowing earlier conclusions. It can be frustrating to

realise how something we thought was solidly proven as a fact and that we have repeated in many contexts, suddenly changes. It can even require that a lot of our own work should indeed be adjusted or, as in my case, repainted. But that is the risk that must be taken, and I would be more worried if it were not so: it is the inevitable part of the process. I myself try to find solace in the fact that although we can never know the complete truth, every new discovery brings us closer to it.

I am very honoured to receive this award, which in a way completes a circle on my path in scientific illustration work and emphasises the importance that *The Prehistoric Society* has had on my endeavours.

Tom Björklund (tom@bjorklund.fi),
artist and illustrator

Traces of touch: from Palaeolithic embodied markings to Amazonian decorated hands, 24th Sara Champion Memorial Lecture, Dr Barbara Oosterwijk

On the 21st October, *The Prehistoric Society* welcomed Dr Barbara Oosterwijk from the University of Exeter to give the Sara Champion Memorial Lecture for 2025. In this thoughtful contribution, Dr Oosterwijk led us through underground worlds of mark-making by our Palaeolithic ancestors. Much ink has been spilled on the topic of Palaeolithic cave art, but most has concerned the easily-recognisable figurative motifs of humans and animals or, more recently, the so-called 'entopic signs' hypothesised as resulting from altered states of consciousness. Dr Oosterwijk's work, however, considers the more overlooked corpus of 'embodied markings: non-figurative traces made with and through the body'. These motifs – hand stencils, hand prints, sprayed discs, finger lines, finger dots, smeared surfaces and sprayed surfaces – she argued, create a 'vocabulary of touch' which shifts focus away from concerns about what the images are towards consideration of *how* they were made. Using photogrammetry and D-stretch software to create over 80 3D models from the cave sites of Ardales (southern Spain), El Castillo (northern Spain) and Pech Merle (southern France), Dr Oosterwijk demonstrated how exploring an 'archaeology of touch' through these acts of 'making, doing and feeling' revealed 'intimate' and 'playful' details about how their makers interacted with their worlds; perspectives hard to grasp elsewhere in the Palaeolithic record.

At the cave refuge of Pech Merle, activity dating to 25–15,000 years ago included the creation of figurative motifs (rendered in black pigment) and non-figurative marks (in red). The latter, we learnt, included thumb stencils, fish created from finger dots, sprayed discs which framed the contours of the cave wall and ceiling, and finger lines which appeared to mimic cave bear scratch-marks. At El Castillo, activity dates to 31–35,000 years ago and comprises 80 hand stencils,

along with sprayed discs and finger dots. The hand stencils, Dr Oosterwijk noted, appear more 'public' in character in easy-to-access spaces and could have marked routeways. Eighty-percent seem to reference the cave topography, as do the finger dots, lines and smeared surfaces which trace its contours. More inaccessible are the sprayed discs, which are found on speleothems but likewise frame the contours of the rock. At Ardales, 90% of the Palaeolithic art (dating to around 58,000 years ago) comprises non-figurative markings, including hand prints, hand stencils and sprayed surfaces. The nine hand prints, which include that of a child, occur mostly in isolation and appear to be 'grabbing' or 'gripping' the rock. The hand stencils, which are rendered (unusually) in black pigment, are more hidden and higher up. Like the hand prints, 14 of these appear to be gripping the rock, while another 16 suggest 'dragging' of the hand. Dr Oosterwijk suggested that two motifs, in which the ring finger and little finger are bent, may have been created by the same individual. As at El Castillo, sprayed surfaces were found on more inaccessible speleothems and areas of the cave ceiling, but appeared as palimpsests, suggesting their (re-)creation over several episodes spanning millennia.

As Dr Oosterwijk noted, certain recurrent observations between the placement of motifs at each of the sites suggests similar preoccupations of the individuals behind the mark-making. Firstly, similar types or forms of motif appear in the same locations (both within and between the sites) and are rarely integrated with occurrences of figurative art. This non-figurative mark-making focuses particularly on transitional features and contours, which (together with the embodied nature of the motifs themselves) suggests tactile engagement with the surface topography of the caves. The types of motif, together with evidence for grabbing,



Dr Barbara Oosterwijk presenting the 24th Sara Champion Memorial Lecture

dragging and bending of the fingers, foregrounds gestures of movement and orientation within the space, the surfaces of which could be considered as an 'extension of the body'.

In the final part of the lecture, we left Europe for the site of Cerro Azul in the Colombian Amazon, where Dr Oosterwijk has been conducting post-doctoral work. The site, which dates to at least 10,200 BP, features over 5000 motifs across 12 major rock art panels, the largest of which is around 100 m long. Work has included mapping the panels with an Artec laser scanner to produce over 200 3D models, together with the experimental use of infrared photography and portable X-Ray Fluorescence (pXRF). Thirty samples are also currently undergoing multi-spectral analysis, with results forthcoming.

The panels feature a range of motifs including anthropomorphic, zoomorphic and rare floral designs, as well as geometric/non-figurative marks. The latter include over 500 hand prints, spread across 6 panels. Of these, 348 (70%) are decorated according to a classificatory scheme including (but not limited to): standard type, spirals, linear motifs, elliptical lines, zig-zags and abstract designs. The standard motifs are often high up and their orange-red pigment has been retouched to render them 'solid'. Spirals account for 73% of the decorated hand prints and have parallels in Brazil, while the linear motifs, which are the second most common motif at 24%, can be found in Brazil and Amazonia. The elliptical lines represent one of the most widespread

decorative traditions, with parallels in Brazil, North America, South Africa and Australia, and were created by scratching into the wet pigment. The zig-zags, on the other hand, are rarer, with parallels in Arizona, while the abstract motifs are not stencilled but rather stylised: a design which has parallels in Mexico.

Across the Cerro Azul corpus left hands predominate, which might be expected if most individuals were right-handed and using their dominant hand to manipulate the tools needed to create the motifs. Adult-sized hands are placed high on panels, while childrens' hands are lower down. Decorated hand prints appear as a darker red colour, with some apparently retouched after painting, while 'simple' hand motifs are more faded.

In addition to recording the motifs, Dr Oosterwijk has also undertaken experimental work using local ochre from the Cerro Azul region, and with the insight of indigenous collaborators to inform on the natural binders and mixers (such as tree latex) required. One important finding was the observation that yellow ochre became a vivid red upon heating, providing insights into how this raw material may have been processed before use. Potential methods for creating the decorated hand prints were also trialled, including applying 'masking' to the surface of the rock and hand using templates and adhesive substances, and using tools or fingernails to scrape off the pigment once applied. Results were moderately successful: only tree latex served as a suitable masking agent and pigment, once applied, had to be scraped off quickly.

Despite these important insights into embodied markings, Dr Oosterwijk cautioned that there is much work still to do! From more extensive study of sprayed surfaces (which appear to be more common than originally thought) to the cross-cultural study of decorated handprints (which are, as yet, absent from the Palaeolithic corpus), comparative study with other kinds of embodied markings such as finger fluting, and further experimental work on pigment recipes and application techniques, we wish Dr Oosterwijk every success in her future research and look forward to hearing the results in due course!

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Tracing early farming practices in Neolithic Croatia: report from the 2nd conference on the Emergence of the Neolithic in Europe (ENE2025), Zadar, Croatia

In May 2025, I had the pleasure of presenting my research at the 2nd conference on the *Emergence of the Neolithic in Europe* (ENE2025), held at the University of Zadar, Croatia. The conference brought together archaeologists from across

Europe to examine the emergence of farming and its varied trajectories across the continent. Rather than a uniform transition, the Neolithisation of Europe is increasingly understood as complex, regionally specific, and often gradual.



ENE2025 host,
University of
Zadar

Zadar, situated on Croatia's Adriatic coast, was a fitting location for the event. The fertile inland plains of northern Dalmatia contain one of the highest concentrations of Neolithic sites in the region. This made it an ideal setting to discuss new research into how early farming communities interacted with their landscapes and adapted agricultural strategies to local conditions.

My presentation, *Tracing early farming practices in Neolithic Croatia through isotopic analysis of cereal remains*, introduced the first isotopic study of Neolithic cereal remains from Croatia. This research uses stable isotope analysis to investigate how early farmers managed crops such as barley and emmer wheat in the karst landscapes of the eastern Adriatic.

Investigating ancient agriculture through isotopes

Over the past two decades, stable carbon ($\delta^{13}\text{C}$) and nitrogen ($\delta^{15}\text{N}$) isotope analysis of charred plant remains has become a key method for reconstructing prehistoric farming practices. Carbon isotopes can reflect crop water status, as a product of environmental conditions and irrigation, while nitrogen isotopes provide insight into manuring intensity and soil fertility management.

My research focuses on charred grains recovered from five Neolithic sites in northern Dalmatia: Pokrovnik, Rašinovac, Danilo-Bitinj, Krivače, and Velištak. These sites, dating to the 6th millennium cal BC, represent some of the earliest farming settlements in the region. The isotope results indicate that crops were likely grown in small (possibly permanent) plots, with differing inputs of organic fertilizer: most likely manure. This points to a medium-intensity, locally-

managed farming system. The carbon data suggest stable water conditions, which aligns with what we know about the region's favourable climate and productive soils. Despite limited archaeobotanical assemblages at some sites, the evidence contributes to a broader understanding of adaptive and regionally tailored farming systems in the Neolithic Adriatic. The findings contribute to wider European studies suggesting that early agriculture was not a rigid, imported package, but rather a flexible set of practices shaped by local conditions, knowledge, and choices.

Sharing and shaping ideas at ENE2025

The ENE2025 conference provided an excellent platform for interdisciplinary exchange. Sessions covered a wide range of themes, from early seafaring and animal domestication to settlement structures, symbolic practices, and environmental change. A recurring theme across many papers was an emphasis on regional diversity. The Neolithic did not unfold uniformly across Europe. In many areas, farmers coexisted for centuries with hunter-gatherer groups, and cultural and technological change occurred unevenly and often innovatively. This diversity was reflected in lively discussions throughout the conference, as researchers brought together perspectives from archaeology, archaeobotany, zooarchaeology, geoarchaeology, and biomolecular science.

Presenting my research in this setting was both intellectually stimulating and professionally rewarding. The discussions that followed were particularly helpful for thinking about how isotopic evidence can be integrated into broader archaeological narratives about Neolithic land use and community organisation.

Looking ahead

This study adds a new layer of understanding to early agricultural practices in south-eastern Europe and contributes to ongoing debates about Neolithic land management and social organisation. I am sincerely grateful to *The Prehistoric Society* for supporting my participation in this conference. The opportunity to present and discuss my findings with such a diverse and engaged audience was invaluable, and it was a privilege to be part of a community of researchers working to better understand the earliest farming societies of Europe.

Many thanks to my collaborators Dr Sarah McClure (University of California, Santa Barbara) and Emil Podrug (Šibenik Museum), for their essential contributions to this research. Publication in an international peer-reviewed journal, including presentation of the full dataset and a detailed discussion of the implications of the findings, is forthcoming.

Kelly Reed (kreed.arken@gmail.com),
independent researcher

The deadline for submissions for PAST 113 is 29th May. Contributions to Editor, Lindsey Büster, Department of Archaeology, King's Manor, Exhibition Square, York, YO1 7EP. E-mail: past@prehistoricsociety.org. Contributions as e-mail attachments are preferred (either .docx or .rtf files) with illustrations sent as .jpeg, .tif or .pdf files. The book reviews editor is Jake Rowland, University of Southampton, University Road, Southampton, SO17 1BJ. E-mail: reviews@prehistoricsociety.org. Queries over subscriptions and membership should go to the Society Administrator at the London address on the front cover. E-mail: admin@prehistoricsociety.org.