

## Going underground – digging for history in Dorset

<b>Event</b>	Archaeology Webinars
<b>Title</b>	Early to post-Medieval: Webinar 3
<b>Date</b>	22 June 2021
<b>Venue</b>	Virtual – via Webex

<b>Q&amp;A Chair</b>	Stuart Fox - Consultant
<b>Presenters</b>	John Boothroyd – Oxford Archaeology Amanda Chadburn – Historic England Steve Wallis - Dorset County Archaeologist, Dorset Council Aimee Tavana – Project Engineer, National Grid Dorset VIP

National Grid launched the first of a series of webinars on 8 June 2021, to showcase the fantastic wealth of archaeological findings uncovered in the 20 months since work began on the Dorset Visual Impact Provision (VIP) project in 2018.

This webinar, focused on the early to post-Medieval period, is led by National Grid's Project Engineer, Aimee Tavana and John Boothroyd of Oxford Archaeology.

This document provides a summary of the questions that were asked during the event and additional questions that were submitted.

The Q&A summary reflects National Grid's thinking at a moment in time (22 June 2021). All information provided is therefore subject to change.

### SESSION 3

#### **Q. How old are the pylons that are being removed?**

**A.** The pylons would have been put up in the 1950s and 1960s. We don't have a specific date for the pylons in this area but this is the general timeframe. These pylons have aged and do require maintenance now, so installing the underground cable will reduce the amount the maintenance required in the area.

#### **Q. What happens to the pylons once they are removed?**

**A.** Everything is recycled. The steel that comes down will either be used on other sites or we will send it to be recycled and used elsewhere.

#### **Q. Was there any archaeology carried out when the pylons were first put in?**

**A.** We suspect not as this was done before archaeology became part of the planning process. There is no record to that effect which we're aware of.

**Q. Did the Medieval burials cut the Iron Age burials? If not, were the Iron Age burials somehow visible in the medieval period?**

**A.** No, there was no direct overlap. It is more likely that burials in this area are Bronze Age than the Iron Age based on the topology, but we have not dated them yet. It is interesting that these earlier burials do seem to have been avoided by the later burials. It is possible there is some associated earth work which was targeted by the medieval burials which was the focus and surrounded by the earlier Bronze Age burials, but we can't prove that in the archaeological record. It is interesting that the different burials seem to respect each other, but we can't be sure what has caused that.

From investigating the Bronze Age burials from the Weymouth Relief Road, there is a theory that Bronze Age burials had small barrows over them. These weren't necessarily the two-metre high features we see surviving today but a foot or two high that would enable them to be visible to future generations.

It's also worth noting that slightly east of those burials, there are two large, more pronounced features which have survived as barrow mounds so it's plausible those smaller ones did as well.

**Q. Is it common to get pet dogs in burials?**

**A.** It is not uncommon to see this. Unfortunately, I suspect the dog was deliberately slaughtered so it could be buried with the people.

**Q. If they were Christian burials, where was their church?**

**A.** We don't know currently. Where the church is, there is a small chapel in Corton Farm which could have earlier origins, but there is no evidence to support that. We are trying to resolve this but it is possible we might not ever get an answer.

**Q. How do you determine that those buried were Christian and were there any headstones at all to identify them?**

**A.** The orientation is traditionally associated with Christian burials. Then, the lack of grave goods also suggests Christian burials. We don't know definitively, but this is our understanding based on what we have found on other sites, and through comparing our evidence to the archaeological record.

Regarding the possibility of headstones, the cemetery is organised so you had the rows of burials aligned. The burials themselves were laid east to west, aligned with the rows of burials going north to south. This style of arrangement suggests the graves were marked in some way, as there would likely be an indication of where each burial is so that later burials didn't impact. This could have been an earthen mound, a stone, or possibly a wooden post. We have no evidence of actual gravestones and it is unlikely they would have had grave markers like that. However, the burials would have somehow identifiable in the landscape.

**Q. How many personnel are likely to be working on the post excavation analysis?**

**A.** We will have two people who will process the initial assessments to start with. This will take an estimated 200 days, and then their work will be fed to additional individuals who will work on other aspects of the project. We suspect the initial assessment will take about a year and a half to

complete. This will be followed by another report which could take further three years to complete, so it will be a time-consuming process which will involve a lot of individuals.

**Q. Are there any pagan Saxons in the Bronze Age burial mounds?**

**A.** In short, no. We have no evidence within the scheme for later insertions if that is the question, apart from within the long barrow where we did have supine burials in the long barrow ditch which we haven't dated yet. It could be that they are Saxon, but we suspect that they are more likely to be Iron Age or Roman.

**Q. Were there any artifacts discovered?**

**A.** In the graves, the actual find assemblage from the graves was poor which also supports the idea they were Christians. There was a ring and buckles, but even nowadays it is not uncommon to be buried with a ring. Buckles could suggest they were buried with clothes and these are the remaining fastenings. There was nothing you could consider to be grave goods.

**Q. Was it just the skull of the dog which was discovered or the whole skeleton?**

**A.** No, it was just the skull which doesn't bode well for the dog. It also has a remarkably large skull so it was probably a hunting dog.

**Q. At the first webinar you mentioned that the archaeological finds exceeded expectations. How much longer did you have to extend the archaeological programme compared to the original estimate?**

**A.** The original estimate was between three and six months, which was overly ambitious. The actual archaeological programme took two years. This is partly due to the archaeological remains exceeding our expectations, but there were other considerations including land access. The initial six month programme was planned based on the knowledge that we were excavating six key areas.

One of the key things which developed with this project was the amount of archaeological remains beyond the excavation areas which hadn't previously been identified. We were all in agreement that it was important to take a look at the entire route in some degree. By identifying remains beyond the key excavation areas, we extended the scope of work. A lot of the remains were found in discrete pits which are very difficult to find by geophysics and trial trenching. It really shows why it is important to design these projects well.

This project worked really well as the archaeology team were on site when the areas were being stripped for construction. This meant that when any unexpected archaeological remains were uncovered, we could all respond thoroughly. We did expose a large amount of archaeological remains this way, about 80 pits in the end. These were added to our monitoring programme in accordance with best practice.

National Grid, Morgan Sindall, and Oxford Archaeology are all proud of the collaborative way we have approached the archaeology on site. We have given it the time and attention this amazing landscape deserves.

**Q. We've asked you for the past two webinars what your favourite find was each period. So to conclude, what is your favourite find from the Medieval period? The overall, what has been the most exciting thing that you have found?**

**A.** This may not be exactly what you're asking, but rather than any individual artifact, the best bit has been being able to look this slice of the landscape and knowing it will provide us with a great deal of detail.

The significance of the remains impacted by the scheme is nothing compared to the improvement to the setting that this project will deliver. However, this project has enabled us to understand and enhance our knowledge of the monuments that are being improved as part of the project by looking at those within the scheme.