

HORSPATH ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORY GROUP.
Newsletter 23/08/2019

The main aim of the Horspath Archaeology & History Group (HAG) is to explore and document the two Horspath's place in the landscape, from the Mesolithic Era up to more recent times.

Sally Humphrey: Group Co-founder and Coordinator

Chris Pym: Group Co-founder and Lead Researcher

Jemma Underdown: Archaeological Advisor

Geoff Roynon: Webmaster and Researcher

Brian Lowe: Post-Medieval Historian

Hello Everyone,

We thought it was time to bring you another update on our recent activities. Do please let Sally know if you have any questions or queries; we'll do our best to answer them as promptly as time allows.

Firstly, and of key importance in reaching a wider interactive audience, Geoff (our webmaster and researcher) has produced a beautiful new website for us and this is now live:-

<http://geoffroynon.co.uk/HAGhome.html>

Please take a look at it and let us know what you think. We are open to all genuine criticisms in order to make our local history more available to anyone with a curiosity about our past.

We particularly want the views of some of our younger villagers. Is there anything we can do to make things more accessible to you? Don't be shy! We (apart from Jemma!) are not professional archaeologists or historians – just ordinary lay people trying to make sense of the village's long and complicated history; and we welcome your views.

Please do forward this newsletter to anyone you feel might be interested.

Newcomers to our group

We would like to welcome **Jemma Underdown**. She is a resident of the village and is beginning a doctorate on the badly documented and somewhat contentious end of the Roman administration in Britain, and the advent & impact of the incoming Anglo-Saxons. If she is successful our history of that period will need much re-writing.

Jemma is studying at Reading University School of Archaeology under Professor Ken Dark. Professor Dark is one of *the* leading scholars in this country of this little understood period.

We will be doing all we can to offer her our support as she begins her studies, possibly by using our local knowledge of Roman activity in this area.

She will also advise us professionally on archaeological matters and help us avoid unnecessary bloopers!

Brian Lowe is well known to all of us from his very popular lectures on the more recent events in Horspath's history and its personalities, and his long-established university tours.

Essentially, he will be our authority on the post-Medieval period, hence the addition of the word "History" in our group title.



1) MPRD. Brian is currently preparing a detailed investigation into the reclamation of material from crashed aircraft from southern Britain during World War 2. It took place at the MPRD (Metal Products Recovery Depot), most of which now lies underneath the BMW works.

The MPRD is reported to have reclaimed sufficient material for the manufacture of an *additional* 5000 aircraft during the war: no mean achievement!

Brian is planning to deliver a lecture on this fascinating story in the HUB later on this year and, hopefully, a booklet to accompany it.

2) OLD HORSEPATH: Our research into Old Horspath continues. We are looking into the possibility of a very early history of the track that

leads to it (and beyond?). At the moment, it seems as if this trackway points directly at a small group of possible Bronze Age crop marks, by way of a possible Roman era building. If proven, then the trackway will have an impressive antiquity!

Also, some new evidence has been found recently along that track by our metal detecting friends (Simon and Toby), namely some badly twisted pieces of glazing bars from an, as yet, unidentified Roman period building. We now need to find that building! (In hand)

3) OUR FIRST FARMERS?

New evidence of Bronze Age farmers in the Horspath – Garsington Area

After the recent spell of hot weather, Geoff spotted – via Google Earth – some curious soil-marks along the Horspath-Garsington ridge which he had not noticed before. They are very rare as they depend on *exactly* the right combination of drought & rain; and vanish quickly :-



Garsington Ridge Crop Marks

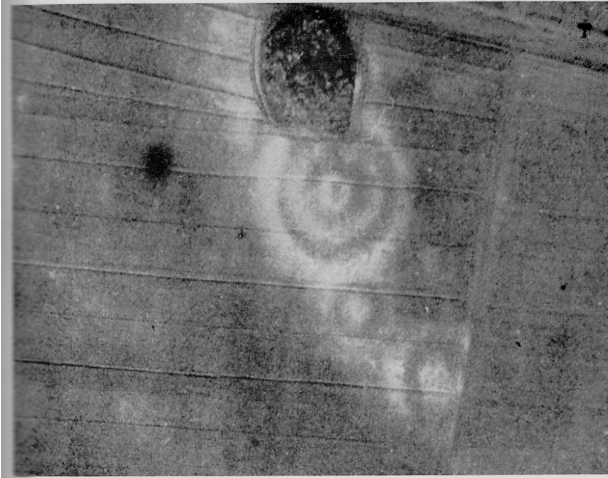
Sally also recently saw some enigmatic circular crop marks on her land :-



In comparing these marks with others in our library files we came to the tentative conclusion that both were Bronze Age barrows, or hut circles, circa 2000-800BC - but we badly need better aerial photos to date them more accurately.

If we can afford it, a Group drone would be ideal as we would then not have to rely on a combination of the weather and chance satellite coverage to find & investigate all local crop and soil marks *etc.* Its deployment could perhaps be useful for other village needs?

The photos (below) for comparison are from Paul Ashbee's "*The Bronze Age Round Barrow in Britain*" Phoenix House 1960.



Va. Ploughed-out barrows seen as soil marks: the Gately Disc Barrow, Hampshire.



Vb. Ploughed-out barrows seen as crop marks: Everley Barrows, Wiltshire.

The similarities are fairly obvious. The question is then *who* were these people?

A recent very large-scale aDNA (**a**ncient DNA) study of peoples of this period showed that the earliest were Neolithic/Bronze Age "Beaker" people (Beaker from the shape of drinking pots found in their graves):

<https://www.archaeology.co.uk/articles/prehistoric-pop-culture-deciphering-the-dna-of-the-bell-beaker-complex.htm>

They were farmers and cattlemen, originating in the Northern Netherlands, and who subsequently settled in southern Britain. These people are very important in the archaeological record as they brought farming to our shores: a truly revolutionary change in food

production, and one that gradually displaced the so-called Hunter-Gatherers who had thinly populated these islands since the end of the last Ice Age. (NB: *we have found several scatters of flint-working debris – and curious small white crystals - from the camping sites of Hunter-Gatherer people around Horspath village. See p. 27 of the Old Horspath paper on the HAG website*)

Faint local traces of the Beaker People and their descendants' ancient field systems can still be seen in some satellite photos.

And we still have the same basic agricultural practises today.

A four thousand year old tradition... The cattle are thankfully (!) somewhat smaller than back then, and machines do much of the cereal work, but basically little else has changed. Food for thought... (Please see our website for the full background to this story)

4) A NEWLY DISCOVERED IRON AGE (?) SETTLEMENT



Photo of the Windmill Field site (Google Earth).
Note hut circles and possible storage pits.

We have discovered a new crop mark (above) in the field by the Wheatley windmill. It has all the hall-marks of a small Iron Age village with hut circles and storage pits.

A small trial test pit revealed evidence of a slumped ironstone (building?) wall. Further test pits are planned for later in the year as currently the ground is like concrete. It may be that this is the ancestral settlement of Old Horspath. Or not.. We shall see!

Finally: Please let us know your thoughts on the new website and the way you would perhaps like to be involved with the group: researching on the web; possibly working on test pits. Or perhaps give us leads as to what areas you feel we might cover in future?

5) NB: Sally is planning to reprint the original Old Horspath paper and the 2 Newsletters in a hard (card) cover. Please let her know if you would like a copy. The approximate cost will be around £12 to £15 per copy for a 25 copy printing in colour, but if less copies are wanted then it will inevitably be slightly more.

Please also visit our website for much more information on all of the above.

And thank you so much for your support to date!

Best Regards

Chris; Sally; Geoff and Brian