

Archaeology notes April to September 2018

The notes, prepared by John Clutterbuck, are condensed versions of items on archaeology appearing in websites in mid 2018. Weblinks are provided to facilitate access to the original articles.

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The “Hobbits” of Flores

BBC 3 Aug 18 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-45049024>

A new study has shown that small height evolved twice in humans on the Indonesian island of Flores. Scientists decoded the DNA of modern-day "pygmy" people to find out if they might be partly descended from the extinct Hobbit species. The remains of these Hobbits were found during an archaeological dig on Flores 15 years ago. The new analysis found no trace of the Hobbit's DNA in present-day people.

Finger bone points to early human exodus

BBC 9 Apr 18 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-43700703>

Modern humans were living in Saudi Arabia about 85,000 years ago. A recently discovered finger bone believed to be *Homo sapiens* was dated using radio isotope techniques, adding to mounting evidence of a widespread dispersal beyond Africa as early as 180,000 years ago. Previously, it was thought that *Homo sapiens* did not live continuously outside Africa until 60,000 years ago.

'Oldest known drawing' found on tiny rock in South Africa

BBC 12 Sep 18 <https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-45501205>

Humanity's oldest known drawing – of a hashtag – has been discovered on a small fragment of rock in Blombos Cave on the southern coast of South Africa. The drawing is about 73,000 years old and shows cross-hatch lines sketched onto stone with red ochre pigment.

Cave girl was half Neanderthal, half Denisovan

BBC 22 Aug 18 <https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-45271644>

DNA analysis of 50,000 year old humanoid bones from excavations in a cave in Siberia reveal interbreeding between two branches of early human relatives – Neanderthals and Denisovans. Some three percent of the DNA in modern humans in Europe and Asia is from Neanderthals.

Prehistoric bake-off: Recipe for oldest bread revealed

BBC 17 Jul 18 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-44846874>

Take flour made from wild wheat and barley, mix with the pulverised roots of plants, add water, then bake. Scientists say that this is the recipe for the world's oldest bread,

dating back more than 14,000 years. Until now the oldest evidence of bread was from Turkey 9,000 years ago. The latest find, from a site in Jordan's Black Desert, pushes back the first evidence for bread-making by more than 5,000 years.

'World's oldest brewery' found in cave in Israel, say researchers

BBC 15 Sep 18

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-45534133>

Evidence of the world's oldest brewery, with residue of 13,000-year-old beer, has been found in a prehistoric cave near Haifa in Israel. The discovery was made while they were studying a burial site for semi-nomadic hunter-gatherers. Brewing beer was thought to go back 5,000 years, but the latest discovery may turn beer history on its head, suggesting that beer was not necessarily a surplus of making bread as previously thought.

Elephant birds: Who killed the largest birds that ever lived?

BBC 13 Sep 18

<https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-45495400>

Prehistoric humans are under suspicion of wiping out the largest birds that ever lived after fossilised bones were discovered with telltale cut marks, evidence that the elephant birds of Madagascar were hunted and butchered for food. The remains have been dated to about 10,000 years ago. Until now, the first settlers were thought to have arrived on the island about 2,500 to 4,000 years ago, pushing back the date of human arrival by 6,000 years.

Secrets of the sea bed: Hunt for Stone Age site in North Sea

BBC 12 Apr 18

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-43711762>

Scientists are exploring the sea bed off Norfolk hoping to find evidence that Stone Age people lived there when it was still dry land. In recent years, some trawler crews and researchers have found prehistoric animal bones and basic stone tools in North Sea sediment. The team aims to map the Brown Bank area, a sand ridge about 30km (19 miles) long. Mesolithic people are thought to have lived there in about 10,000-5,000 BC. Article contains a map showing how land has been lost to the sea.

Traces found of 'world's oldest cheese'

BBC 5 Sep 18

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-edinburgh-east-fife-45408848>

Traces of what is thought to be the world's oldest cheese have been found at an archaeological site at Pokrovnik on the Dalmatian coast of Croatia. Traces of 7,000-year-old fatty acids were found on fragments of pottery.

Ancient Egyptian mummification 'recipe' revealed

BBC 16 Aug 18

<https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-45175764>

Forensic chemical tests carried out on a mummy that dated from 3,700-3,500 BC revealed the recipe and confirmed that it was developed far earlier and used more widely than previously thought. The basic recipe was: a plant oil, possibly sesame oil; a "balsam-type" plant or root extract that may have come from bulrushes; a plant-

based gum, a natural sugar that may have been extracted from acacia; crucially, a conifer tree resin, which was probably pine resin.

Brú na Bóinne: Megalithic tomb discovered in Meath

BBC 17 Jul 18

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-44850668>

A 5,500 year-old tomb has been discovered at Dowth, County Meath, near Newgrange. The two burial chambers were discovered within the western part of the main passage tomb, over which a large stone cairn was raised. Six kerbstones are believed to have formed part of a ring of stones that followed the cairn perimeter, with one of the kerbstones heavily decorated with Neolithic carvings.

Iceman's Last Meal was high fat, high calorie feast

BBC 13 Jul 18

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-44807101>

Scientists have revealed that the last supper of Oetzi the Iceman was well-balanced but high in fat. The man lived 5,300 years ago and met his death on a frozen glacier. His body was preserved in the ice for millennia until it was discovered in 1991. They say he filled his stomach with fat from wild goat, meat from red deer, an ancient grain known as einkorn and toxic fern. The fat content was 50%, much higher than the 10% in the average modern diet.

Stonehenge: first residents from West Wales

BBC 2 Aug 18

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-45046354>

The strontium isotope signature of cremated remains of the first long term residents of Stonehenge reveals that they were from the same part of Wales as the "bluestones" that were first used to build the monument 5,000 years ago.

Early Egyptian pottery workshop

Voice of America News 19 Jul 18

<https://www.voanews.com/a/archaeologists-find-ancient-pottery-workshop-in-egypt/4489524.html>

An early pottery workshop, situated close to the Nile River in Aswan province in southern Egypt, has been discovered. It dates from the Old Kingdom and belongs to the 4th Dynasty, spanning 2,613 to 2,494 BC, a time when pyramid-building flourished.

Ancient farmers transformed the Amazon

Science Daily 23 Jul 18

<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2018/07/180723142845.htm>

Charcoal, pollen and plants remains from soil in archaeological sites and sediments from a nearby lake in eastern Brazil provided evidence that maize, sweet potato, manioc and squash were farmed as early as 4,500 years ago in this part of the Amazon. Farmers increased the amount of food they grew by improving the nutrient content of the soil through burning and the addition of manure and food waste.

Welcome to the Meghalayan Age - a new phase in history

BBC 18 Jul 18

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-44868527>

The official history of Earth has a new chapter - and we are in it. Geologists have classified the last 4,200 years as being a distinct age in the story of our planet. They are calling it the Meghalayan Age, the onset of which was marked by a mega-drought. The drought, whose effects lasted two centuries, severely disrupted civilisations in Egypt, Greece, Syria, Palestine, Mesopotamia, the Indus Valley, and the Yangtze River Valley. It is thought to have been triggered by shifts in ocean and atmospheric circulation.

Bronze Age Prosthetic hand

Live Science 26 Sep 18

<https://www.livescience.com/63690-oldest-metal-hand-europe.html>

A 3,500-year-old prosthetic bronze hand outfitted with a gold cuff has been discovered at Lake Biel in the Canton of Bern, Switzerland. Archaeologists said that the slightly smaller-than-life hand, crafted during the Bronze Age, is the oldest metal sculpture of a human body part in Europe.

Ancient Egypt: Cheese discovered in 3,200-year-old tomb

BBC 18 Aug 18

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-45233347>

A substance dating from 3,200 years ago found near Cairo in an Ancient Egyptian tomb has proved to be one of the oldest cheeses to be discovered. Archaeologists found a "solidified whitish mass" in one of the jars in the tomb which has been identified as cheese.

Ecuador's colonial past "written in soil"

BBC 19 Jul 18

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-44821726>

The study of soil cores from Ecuador's Quijos valley has yielded an account of the area's history after the arrival of the Spanish in the 1500s. The decimation of the region's indigenous population is told by a study of plants. Prior to the arrival of Europeans, the region had been widely farmed by Quijos peoples. The Quijos peoples was cultivated maize before the arrival of Europeans and there was very little tree pollen to be found.

A spike in charcoal in the soil sample coincided with records of an uprising against Spanish rule in the mid-16th century. A sharp increase in grass pollen then gave way to evidence of the forest slowly returning. Nature was reclaiming the valley and the people who had inhabited it for at least 1,000 years were gone. By the 19th century, the cloud forest had been repopulated by many of the same species that had occupied the area around 40,000 years earlier, before the first humans arrived in South America.

Iron Age study targets British DNA mystery

BBC 11 Apr 18

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-43712587>

A project to sequence DNA from about 1,000 ancient remains could resolve a genetic mystery involving people from south-east Britain. A recent study showed that the present-day genetic landscape of Britain was largely laid down by the Bronze Age. During the Iron Age or Roman Period, the DNA of people in the south-east diverged somewhat from that of populations in the rest of the Britain. The new study aims to provide insights into changes in the population of south-east Britain.

Pompeii victim crushed by boulder while fleeing eruption

BBC 30 May 18

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-44303247>

Archaeologists at Pompeii have uncovered the remains of an unfortunate man who was decapitated by an enormous rock while fleeing the volcanic eruption. This skeleton seems to be that of a man who survived the initial explosion and was trying to flee. A leg injury may have slowed him down before he was crushed by the huge stone. The skeleton shows signs of a bone infection in his leg, which could have made walking - much less running - very difficult.

Bedfordshire's first Roman town wall unearthed in Sandy

BBC 16 Jun 18

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-beds-bucks-herts-44487020>

An archaeological dig in Sandy, Bedfordshire, has uncovered about 200 items dating from the Iron Age in 500 BC to the Saxon period in 800 AD. Among the finds is a Roman wall, a first for Bedfordshire, and the remains of a Saxon house.

Broughton Roman Villa

Oxford Archaeology 28 Aug 18

<https://oxfordarchaeology.com/news/807-one-of-the-largest-villas-in-roman-britain-found-in-oxfordshire>

An investigation by Oxford Archaeology on the Broughton Castle estate near Banbury has revealed one of the largest villas in Roman Britain, a villa with a courtyard some 85m square, comparable in size to the grand villas at Chedworth and Woodchester in Gloucestershire.

Hun migrations 'linked to deadly Justinian Plague'

BBC 10 May 18

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-44046031>

Scientists say one of the deadliest plagues in history may be linked to the migration westward of the Hun peoples. The Justinian Plague, which struck in 541 AD, may have killed as many as 25 million. Now, scientists say the outbreak probably originated in Asia, not Egypt as contemporary and more recent chroniclers had thought. The finding comes from analysis of DNA found in 137 human skeletons unearthed on the Eurasian steppe. The steppe region covers a vast area, spanning some 8,000km from Hungary to north-eastern China. The large sample of individuals covers a date range of 2,500 BC - 1,500 AD.

Heatwave reveals lost prehistoric sites in England

BBC 15 Jul 18

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-45170581>

<https://historicengland.org.uk/whats-new/news/hot-dry-summer-reveals-hidden-archaeological-sites>

During the dry weather, surveys from the air have revealed many new archaeological features in sites around the country, dating from 4,000 BC to the eighteenth century.

Heatwave reveals lost prehistoric site in Ireland

BBC 12 Jul 18

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-44801939>

Outline of henge revealed near 5,000 year old monument at Newgrange in County Meath, by the River Boyne in County Meath, Ireland.

Heatwave reveals lost prehistoric sites in Scotland

BBC 13 Jul 18 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-edinburgh-east-fife-44812713>

<https://www.historicenvironment.scot/about-us/news/new-evidence-of-ancient-settlements-spotted-from-scotland-s-skies>

Heatwave reveals lost prehistoric site in Wales

New Scientist 11 Jul 18

<https://www.newscientist.com/article/mg23931862-800-record-temperatures-mean-ancient-forts-become-visible-in-fields/>

<https://rcahmw.gov.uk/wales-wide-drought-reveals-further-lost-archaeological-monuments>

The outlines of a medieval hilltop fort known as Castell Llwyn Gwinau have been revealed in a field near the town of Tregaron in Wales.

Shipwrecks at Tankerton and Camber Sands to be protected

BBC 16 Jul 18

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-kent-44838683>

An "incredible" Tudor shipwreck, found on Kent mudflats near Whitstable is of a late 16th or early 17th century single-masted merchant ship of around 100 to 200 tonnes. A second wreck discovered in 2016 at Camber Sands, East Sussex, is also being investigated.

400 Year old shipwreck found off Cascais

BBC 24 Sep 18

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-45630260>

Spices, ceramics and cannons engraved with Portugal's coat of arms lie around a 400-year-old shipwreck, found near Cascais, close to the capital Lisbon. Archaeologists believe the ship was returning from India when it sank sometime between 1575 and 1625, at the height of Portugal's spice trade with Asia.

The London: Historic warship's secrets go on display

BBC16 Sep 18

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-essex-45521765>

Finds from the 17th Century wreck of The London include a brass cannon stolen from the Dutch and shoe with a sailor's footprint still visible will go on display at Southend Central Museum, a few miles from where the vessel exploded in 1665. Mystery still surrounds how it met its fate. Items from the London will also feature at the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich in its Tudor and Stuart Seafarers gallery.