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CAMBRIDGE SOCIETY FOR THE APPLICATION OF
RESEARCH

NOTE CHANGE OF START TIME – ONE HOUR EARLIER THAN LAST YEAR!!

June; 2049 BC

Dating the Holme Next the Sea Tree Circle

Monday 11th February 2002: **7.30 p.m. - 9.00 p.m.**¹
The Wolfson Lecture Theatre, Churchill College, Cambridge

Abstract

Dr Alex Bayliss writes:

“In August 1998 a sub-circular ring of 55 oak timbers surrounding a large inverted oak tree was discovered off the coast of Norfolk. As part of the initial research into the find, an innovative approach was adopted for dating the structure. Adopting a method first suggested by the Reverend Thomas Bayes in 1753, relative dating information provided by the tree-rings was combined with high-precision radiocarbon measurements to decide between several inconclusive dates suggested by dendrochronology. Subsequent tree-ring analysis has clarified the process of constructing the monument.”

About the Speaker

Dr Alex Bayliss is the Scientific Dating Co-ordinator of English Heritage. She is an archaeologist with particular expertise in the use of quantitative methods to answer archaeological questions. Her research interest include the application of Bayesian methods in archaeology, numeric classification, and the problems of accuracy encountered when producing precise chronologies using radiocarbon dating

The Chair will be Professor Martin Jones, of the Dept of Archaeology at the University of Cambridge. Professor Jones is familiar with Dr Bayliss's work.

About the Subject (*Organising Secretary's notes*)

I confess to a particular attachment to the tree circle (as was) at Holme Next the Sea. When it became public, I decided to go and find it for myself; this involved careful checks with the coastguard control at Ipswich, since the monument was only visible at low Spring and Autumn tides (so we were told). My first attempt was unsuccessful – the location was supposed to be a secret, and my inductive reasoning misled me by a few miles. Then I happened to phone my son in York, when by good fortune his friend from Burnham Market was visiting. The friend knew exactly where the tree circle was (the locals have known about it for decades – centuries, even). With the help of a very old OS map (at his end) and a modern one (at my end of the phone) I got a pretty good fix. When next I visited, I had the very good fortune to walk straight up to the monument! Interestingly, the very old OS map describes the area as ‘Petrified Forest’ (a description lacking from the metric version).

I was outraged by the decision to remove the tree circle, and even further outraged when I discovered that someone had taken a band saw and a drill to it!

¹**Note:** We have now decided to **KEEP** the **earlier** start time of **7.30 p.m.**; Thanks to all who voted, and sorry to those who wanted to revert to the later time – we hope you will continue to support us, nevertheless

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All this is in the interest of ‘rescue archaeology’ – rescuing the data, but not the artefact. No one in the press bothered to mention this small but important fact.

Perhaps to atone for the removal of the tree circle, English Heritage organised a one-day symposium on the tree circle to an invited audience in King’s Lynn one Saturday. It was packed, with all the usual suspects, including a few Druids and locals demanding to know why their monument of centuries had been taken away from them.

It was all a very civilised and ‘English’ affair, the Druids and the locals all turned out to be very reasonable and sensible, and no one was arrested. The talks were all very good – although Dr Bayliss’s was probably one of the best.

If you want to see the deconstructed tree circle, it lives at Flag Fen; those who took the trip to Flag Fen which I organised on behalf of the CSAR last year may have seen it. The curator, Dr Maisie Taylor, tells me that other tree circles exist off the coast near Holme – and she discovered one near Peterborough (but only the holes, no timbers).

Do come along to Alex’s talk; it’s seriously good science, and very well presented.

Richard Freeman
Organising Secretary



The Tree Circle at Holme Next the Sea, before it was removed. In the background are the sand dunes which constitute a Bird Sanctuary (one of the reasons why the circle was removed – the owners of the sanctuary wanted it off their patch). The log to the left is driftwood – nothing to do with the monument. Most of the surrounding area is waterlogged peat – hence the ‘Petrified Forest’ described in the old OS map. For much of the year, the circle never appeared above the sea – but surf-boarders say that there are other circles which they can see down through the water when it is clear.....