

Association for Environmental Archaeology Newsletter 72 (May 2001)

ISSN 1363-6553

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Edited by Wendy Carruthers and Vanessa Straker

Copy dates for Newsletter: 20th of the following months - January / April / July / October.

Items for the Newsletter may be submitted by e-mail or on disk (3.5" floppy disks in IBM-PC format as WordPerfect, Word or ASCII files). Short typed manuscripts can be sent to:

Wendy Carruthers, Sawmills House, Castellau, Llantrisant, Mid Glamorgan CF72 8LQ, U.K. - Tel: +44 1443 223462 - e-mail: wendy.carruthers@virgin.net

Vanessa Straker, School of Geographical Sciences, University of Bristol, University Rd., Bristol, BS8 1SS, U.K. - Fax: +44 117 928 7878 - e-mail: V.Straker@Bristol.ac.uk

AEA Membership Secretary: Ruth Pelling, Oxford University Museum of Natural History, Parks Road, Oxford OX1 3PW, U.K. - Tel: +44 1865 272 983 - Fax: +44 1865 272 970 - e-mail: ruth.pelling@oum.ox.ac.uk

AEA website: <http://www.envarch.net/>

EDITORIAL

Many thanks to all those who have been in touch to tell us whether they wish to receive paper or e-mail versions of the Newsletter. There are still 66 members who have not told us that

they would like a paper copy and for whom we have no e-mail address. If you are one of them, we are enclosing another letter asking for this information. You are being sent a paper copy for **one last time** and after that we will assume that you do not wish to receive the Newsletter.

NEWS FROM THE COMMITTEE

SUMMARY OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING, 30 MARCH 2001

COMMITTEE UPDATE

Following the recent elections at the Annual General Meeting of the Association for Environmental Archaeology, a new Secretary, Carol Palmer, was elected and three new ordinary members, Andy Howard, Tim Mighall and Ruth Pelling (new Membership Secretary, previously co-opted). Rupert Housley (Treasurer, previously co-opted) was elected to fill the two-year vacancy left by Carol Palmer after she took up the Secretary's position. Helen Smith now takes on the role of Conference Officer. The current AEA Managing Committee includes:

Elected committee members [elected term in]

Jan Bastiaens (Gent) [2000-2003]
Megan Brickley (Birmingham) AEA Publicity Officer [1998-2002]
Otto Brinkkemper (ROB Amsterdam) [1999-2002]
Allan Hall (York) – Chair [2000-2003]
Andy Howard (Leeds) [2001-2004]
Rupert Housley (Glasgow) – Treasurer [2001-2003]
Sabine Karg (Copenhagen) [1998-2002]
Tim Mighall (Coventry) [2001-2004]
Carol Palmer (Leicester) – Secretary [2001-2004]
Ruth Pelling (Oxford) – Membership Secretary [2001-2004]
Helen Smith (Bournemouth) – Conference Officer [2000-2003]

Co-opted committee members

Wendy Carruthers (Llantrisant, Wales) – Co-editor of the Newsletter
Glynis Jones (Sheffield) – Managing Editor of the Journal
Jacqui Mulville (Oxford) – Journal Publicity Officer
Vanessa Straker (Bristol) – Co-editor of the Newsletter

Elected officers and ordinary members now undertake the majority of committee jobs. Some important jobs, such as that of journal editor, are undertaken for more than the usual three-year elected term and committee members fulfilling these tasks are co-opted beyond their elected term to ensure essential smooth-running of the organisation.

The current committee would like to thank the outgoing committee members, Becky Nicholson, Terry O'Connor and Wendy Smith, for all their hard work on behalf of the AEA over the past few years. Becky Nicholson, who retired from the position of Membership Secretary in December, deserves special thanks for her many years of service. Particular thanks are also extended to Wendy Smith for taking on the role of Secretary over the past 12 months and for production of a splendid new poster to advertise the AEA.

At the committee meeting, members were updated on the committee's activities. Glynis Jones has continued her good work as Managing Editor of the journal, EA, and publication of the conference proceedings backlog is now up to date. During the past twelve months, the committee also concentrated efforts on upgrading the website and electronic circulation of the

Newsletter, following the support for this received from the membership at the Guildford AGM last year. Further details follow:

CONFERENCE UPDATE

Publication

Three conference proceedings were published in 2000 (Durham, Bradford and Newcastle). Papers from the Limerick and Stavanger conferences are currently under consideration for publication in EA. The publication of last year's Guildford conference proceedings is at an advanced stage.

Forthcoming conferences/one-day meetings

Unfortunately, due to a clash of dates with the Dutch Archaeometry meeting, the 2002 Belgium conference has had to be cancelled. A possible extended fieldtrip in the UK may replace the spring conference. Further details will follow in future newsletters and on the website.

The spring 2003 conference will be organised by Nicki Whitehouse and Finbar McCormick at Belfast University. The conference theme is Worlds Apart? Human settlements and biota of islands.

2004 is the 25th Anniversary of the AEA. Ralf Baumeister (Director of the Federseemuseum) and Helmut Schlichtherle (Director of the Landesdenkmalamt) have invited the AEA to Bad Buchau for the annual conference. Bad Buchau is situated in an archaeologically rich area and it is anticipated that there will be a number of fieldtrips, which may include the Federseemuseum and park, the Heuneburg, Lake Constance, and the new Museum for Archaeology in Frauenfeld (Switzerland). This conference will take place in early September, the preferred time for the conference organisers, which would also allow participants to visit on-going excavations.

Papers are invited for the autumn 2001 one-day meeting in Birmingham (18th September), in honour of Prof. Susan Limbrey. Please see the announcement below.

JOURNAL UPDATE

Volume 6 of the journal will be published in 2001.

The committee is still actively considering moving to two issues of the journal per year, provided enough good quality copy continues to be received. This follows the postal vote last year in favour of this change and also a favourable show of hands at the AGM.

WEBSITE (<http://www.envarch.net>)

The new upgraded website went on-line in May 2000 and was managed by Mark Beech at the University of York, who received a fee from the AEA for providing this service. Members are encouraged to send items for inclusion (Word for Windows files and .jpg images) to the [Webmaster](#). Feedback is also encouraged to the committee (via cp24@le.ac.uk).

NEWSLETTER

The newsletter is now sent electronically to members who have not requested a paper copy.

MEMBERSHIP

The subscription fee increased this year from £16 to £20 for ordinary members (overseas members add £4 for post & packing), £12 for students/unwaged (no extra postage charge for overseas members in this category).

TREASURER'S REPORT

The full accounts for the AEA were published in [Newsletter 71 \(February 2001\)](#). At the AGM, Rupert Housley reported that most of the AEA's income is received through subscription and the majority of general expenditure is on the journal. The published figures do not include payment to Oxbow for EA 5. It is anticipated that decreased costs associated with circulation of the Newsletter by e-mail will be spent on development and maintenance of the website. Income is expected to increase as a result of the rise in the subscription rate.

AEA POSTER

Through the good offices of Wendy Smith, and with the assistance of English Heritage staff at the Centre for Archaeology, Portsmouth, the Association now has a new, easy-to-use laminated A1-sized poster with information about the Association and how to get membership details. It's designed primarily for use at meetings of organisations other than the AEA so, if you are attending a meeting and would like to use one of the copies to help recruit new members, contact Allan Hall (EAU, Dept of Biology, University of York, PO Box 373, York YO10 5YW, biol8@york.ac.uk). (We hope in due course to have versions translated into the same European languages as used on the paper and web versions of the Membership Form, so it should be useful for all international meetings.)

CONFERENCES AND MEETINGS

ONE DAY MEETING IN HONOUR OF PROFESSOR SUSAN LIMBREY.

AEA / Department of Ancient History and Archaeology, University of Birmingham.
18th September 2001.

Nature of the meeting

This one day meeting is the annual one day AEA meeting with an added twist. In addition Susan Limbrey is retiring in September 2001 it seem the ideal opportunity to present a day conference in her honour.

The day meeting will take place in the Arts Building at Birmingham University. There will be a booking fee of £ 5.00 which can be paid in advance or on the day.

Papers

We are seeking 15–20 minute papers. Though Susan's interests are mainly associated with archaeological soils, micromorphology and landscape change she has always had a wider set of interests than this. As a result all papers on any aspect of environmental archaeology are welcome. Traditionally the one day AEA conference is a forum for the presentation of papers by people new in the field or papers were the advice of a friendly audience would be appreciated.

The following people have kindly agreed (or been coerced) to give papers:

- Tony Brown, University of Exeter. The Severn-Wye Revisited: Floodplain Palaeoenvironments in the Wye Basin
- Matt Canti, English Heritage "Wondering about worms: stones, soil and stratigraphy"
- Dylan Cox English Heritage. Conservation of archaeological bone: To consolidate or not to consolidate?
- Jen Heathcote English Heritage 'Landscape evolution and land-use in the Lesser Antilles'

- David Smith, University of Birmingham. A Divertimenti: burnt mounds, beetles and burnt pigs.
- 'Wendy Mathews, The University of Reading. Microstratigraphy and micromorphology: contributions to interpretation of the Neolithic settlement and landscape at Catalhoyuk, Turkey.'

We intend to publish the papers in a conference proceeding in honour of Susan Limbrey.

Accommodation and catering

Tea and coffee will be provided on the day. Lunch will not be formally organised but there is a wide range of food outlets on the campus.

There will be the possibility to organise accommodation for the nights of the 17th and the 18th. This will range from floor space, spare beds and sofas through to B & Bs or 5 star hotels in the centre of town.

Dinner in honour of Susan Limbrey

On the evening of the 18th of September 2001 the Department of Ancient History and Archaeology will be holding a dinner at Horton Grange (on the university campus) for Susan Limbrey. All of Susan's friends, those she has worked with in the past, speakers on the day and conference attendees are welcome. The dining room can take up to 70 people. The expected cost is around £ 30.00 for a three-course dinner. More details of this will be given in the August newsletter along with a more detailed booking form.

THE STATE-OF-THE-ART IN PHYTOLITH AND STARCH RESEARCH IN THE AUSTRALIAN-PACIFIC-ASIAN REGIONS

CALL FOR CONFERENCE REGISTRATIONS AND ABSTRACTS

Hosted by the Centre for Archaeological Research

To be held at the Australian National University, August 1-3, 2001, Canberra, Australia

The last few years have seen significant advances in the realms of phytolith and starch research, particularly as applicable to archaeological and palaeoenvironmental studies in the Australian-Pacific-Asian regions. It is thus an opportune time to hold a meeting in Australia focusing on the state-of-the-art and current research projects involving starch and phytoliths. The meeting is designed to serve as a forum for both investigators who are actively involved in starch and phytolith research, as well as interested researchers from other disciplines, such as archaeologists, who may be unaware of recent advances and what these techniques might offer in terms of advancing their own research. Contributions from all areas of phytolith and/or starch research will be sought for oral or poster presentations. Papers relevant to the Australian-Pacific-Asian regions are particularly welcome.

Key note addresses will be delivered by Dr Dolores Piperno (Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute, Panama) and Dr Debby Pearsall (University of Missouri).

Registrations are required by 15th June, and abstracts by June 30th. For an information package and registration form you can contact myself at Lynley.Wallis@jcu.edu.au or Amanda Kennedy (Amanda.Kennedy@anu.edu).

CONFERENCE REPORTS

**Association for Environmental Archaeology, Queens University Belfast
'Recent Research in Environmental Archaeology in Ireland', 25th November 2000**

It was unfortunate that, due to no fault on behalf of the organiser, this important meeting clashed with the Annual Irish Association of Professional Archaeologists Meeting in Sligo. Nevertheless, this did not prevent a turn out of around 30 delegates from both the academic and public spheres of archaeology and environmental archaeology from participating in a lively day meeting that covered a refreshingly diverse range of subjects ranging from bones (L. van Wijngaarden-Bakker, S. Hamilton-Dyer, C.Gleed-Owen, F.McCormick), wood (I.Stuijts), seeds (P.Johnston), coleoptera (N.Whitehouse, E.Reilly), tephra and pollen (G.Plunkett). These papers highlighted the excellent range and quality of work being carried out in Ireland. Other papers covered areas proximal to Ireland, considering recent research on the Isle of Man (P.Tomlinson) and Scotland (M.Church). Prof. Mike Baillie bewitched the audience with blasted oaks, myths, biblical tales, comets and airbursts.

However, it seemed to this delegate that the final paper of the day by Dr Gillian Plunkett (Irish Archaeological Wetland Unit) summed up the state of environmental archaeology in the public sector of archaeology in Ireland: the vast potential of many sites appears to be hampered by the lack of funding or opportunities for palaeoenvironmental work. The recent Derryville Project, work as part of which formed the subject of two papers (I.Stuijts, B.Gearey) has demonstrated what can be achieved through generous funding alongside an enlightened and an integrated archaeological-environmental approach. The fear is that such opportunities may be the exception rather than the rule in future environmental archaeology in Ireland. For this reason it is an especial pity that more of the archaeological brethren were unable to be present to debate this and the many other issues that arose throughout the day. Dr Whitehouse is to be congratulated for organising this long over-due meeting; hopefully the next will not be long in coming.

Dr Ben Gearey, Wetland Archaeology and Environments Research Centre, University of Hull, Hull, HU6 7RX.

CONFERENCE REPORT

**The Alluvial Archaeology of North West Europe and the Mediterranean.
18th to the 19th of December 2000. Convenors: A. J. Howard, M.G. Macklin and D.G. Passmore.**

Firstly, my apologies, particularly to Andy Howard, for the lateness of this review. I am afraid that my department was QAAed shortly after the conference and this exquisite torture greatly delayed my preparation of this review. This is a shame since this was a good conference and comments on it nearer the time would have done it more justice.

The conference was well organised, extremely interesting and addressed the many trends and issues currently concerning alluvial studies. Mark Macklin set the scene splendidly on the first night at his keynote address. He outlined what he thought were the main themes raised by the 1990 "archaeology under alluvium conference" and developments that have happened since. I have tried to slot my review of the various papers under these headings and I apologise to Prof. Macklin for stealing these categories from him.

1) Urban environments

Both Jane Siddell and Fiona Haughey clearly demonstrated that the archaeology under the alluvium in London and on the modern intertidal zone of the Thames indicates that well preserved archaeological sites should not be considered as unexpected. Siddell laid particular emphasis on the role that the adoption of PPG 16 has placed in forcing the pace and direction of this work. Rightly she also identified the main flaw in the operation of PPG 16 is the inability to undertake synthesis or explore wider themes.

2) The role and relative importance of human activity and climate change in the formation of alluviation

This was still “the big issue”. Papers by both Mark Macklin and Tony Brown suggested that in Northern Europe the issue was beginning to move on from the old “is it climate or human” debate. Both of them suggested that the key was that human action “sensitised” river systems to climatic change and short-term events, and that this effect was cumulative over time.

3) Dating of deposits

This was an issue that really was not explored in great detail. The feeling was some of the techniques, particularly optical thermoluminescence, that had seemed the way forward 10 years ago, had rather lost their shine. The real jaw dropping moment of the conference was in a paper by Michel Waters on geoarchaeology in the South West of the United States. He argued that an alluvial sequence needs 150-250 radiocarbon dates to give it any temporal accuracy. For those of us who have trouble getting “top, bottom and middle” dates for our north European sequences this was jaw dropping stuff and did rather make us green with envy.

4) Holocene and historic channel change

This was a common theme in many papers noticeably those by Parker and Robinson at Eton Rowing Lake and work by Maas, Brewer and Macklin in the upper Severn valley. Both this last paper and that by Challis clearly showed the implications and promise of topographic mapping and GIS techniques especially when combined with bore hole measurements. Many of the papers dealing with alluvial sequences in areas outside of Europe again emphasised these points, but using the more “old fashioned” techniques.

5) Techniques to provenance alluvial sediments

In his general introduction to the conference Macklin presented a case study tying alluvial sequences to particular parts of the catchment. This was backed up by a number of papers that made the point that highlands, the middle of catchments and events in estuaries must all be linked. I got the feeling that this was perhaps one of the areas where the “alluvial community” still needs to carry out further research.

6) Palaeoflood detection and the effects of extreme events on human behaviour

Given I produced a poster with Andy Howard on possible Palaeoflood detection using insect remains probably the least said the better on this subject (P.S. the fact that this faced the door on entrance was completely by accident – honest). However, I was surprised that this subject did not come up more often and I suppose is potentially an area that needs further consideration.

7) Predicting archaeological survival and potential of river valleys

This topic, of course, was key to many of the archaeologists present. One of the results of the 1990 conference, and the following publication, is that the archaeological potential of deposits in floodplains became widely recognised. Many of the north European examples showed how prospection by watching brief in advance of quarrying or construction could reveal spectacular archaeology, and the difficulties that such discoveries can bring for planning and management. This was particularly shown in Mike Bishop’s discussion of curatorial strategies, Lynden Cooper’s work in Hemington quarry and the various projects associated with the Betuweroute projects in the Netherlands. For once it was nice to see non Northern Europeans turning green over the spectacular nature of our local archaeology record. Several papers again suggested the value of GIS techniques and borehole mapping in defining initial areas for prospection and study in river valleys for commercially driven projects.

In terms of my general impressions of the conference I was really struck by a number of issues. There is a distinct move towards the consideration of catchments as a whole (spring to mouth) and of the "sensitivity" of river systems to stimulus both human and "natural".

Equally, alluvial studies seem to be flourishing worldwide and not just in Northern Europe, as the many papers dealing with the southern Mediterranean demonstrated.

The quality of the type of work being done in Northern Europe really stood out. The studies given showed spectacular results from sheer hard repeated graft or the canny application of clever and innovative techniques. This seemed initially surprising since we tend to bemoan our lot here in these wet and chilly climes. The problem of how excavation is driven now by PPG 116 and commercial imperative rather than research and how the present research boards will only fund innovative work rather than the application of existing techniques and so on were all raised. This conference, however, showed the results that could come by "boxing clever" and using the system.

In the bar I wondered about this and one of my colleges compared the situation to science in the last years of the Soviet Union. Strapped for cash "big science" had to be particularly inventive and think laterally, to often great results. Maybe that's the challenge for us all in future years as we try to keep this productive ball rolling. Like veal, we may all deplore the process of its production but by god the results taste good.

Lastly, I felt very sorry for the many foreign visitors to this conference, some who had never been to Britain before. When they arrived Leeds was dark, damp and foggy when they left it was still the same. Along with the architecture of Devonshire Hall this gave the whole proceedings a slight feeling of the last act of a Wagner Opera. However, I believe that the content of the conference more than made up for any shortcomings in English weather.

This conference demonstrated that alluvial archaeology is a lively research area and I am looking forward to the next alluvial conference in ten years time.

D. Smith. Department of Ancient History and Archaeology, The University of Birmingham.

CONFERENCE REPORT

AEA meeting with North Atlantic Biocultural Organisation, University of Glasgow, 29th-31st March 2001.

With Barry Cunliffe having recently rediscovered the Atlantic Ocean, it is appropriate that the AEA shared its 2001 Conference with NABO. The conference was subtitled Economies, environments and subsistence in the North Atlantic, a regional focus that allowed a refreshingly wide range of practical techniques and theoretical approaches to be demonstrated. Forty-two papers were presented, beginning in Atlantic Canada, then propelled eastwards by Coriolis' Forces to lap the shores of Belgium and Cornwall after three rather full days.

Several of the conference sessions presented different strands of research associated with one field project. The most substantial of these comprised nine papers originating in the Myvatn project in northern Iceland. The Myvatn session took us into territory not often seen at AEA conferences, such as tephra dating and the inference of social organisation from settlement patterns, and was all the better for it. In the abstract of their introductory paper, Adolf Fridriksson and Orri Vesteinsson stress the value of a project in which "...different scholars from different disciplines can work together, have fun and produce significant results in the process", laudable aims that have clearly been fully met. In particular, the Myvatn papers spanned a range of spatial scales, from an eight-author contribution on soil degradation and landscape change over tens of kilometres, to Karen Milek's minute

dismantling of floor deposits within individual buildings. The large-scale work is essential to give a context to the detailed studies, which in turn provide an articulation with the small scale of individual human activities. The fine dating and stratigraphic correlation that tephra allows gives an enviable framework to link the extensive and the intensive, giving a coherence to the project. In all, the Myvatn session was the most satisfying of the conference.

Old Scatness Broch, Shetland, provided a short session on the Friday afternoon, though at least three other Scatness-based papers turned up on Saturday's bill of fare, and they could have been added to the session. To have done so would have juxtaposed papers that stressed the economic importance of barley (Julie Bond), of fish (Rebecca Nicholson), and of butter (Carl Challinor, striving manfully with the dreaded last-paper-of-the-conference slot). Either they cannot all be right, or the 'subsistence' economy of first millennium AD Shetland was more complex and interconnected than the study of any one resource will reveal. Certainly it was a well-housed economy: Helen Bowstead Stallybrass explained the experimental reconstruction of a wheel-house, and showed very clearly what substantial and durable structures they must have been. Elsewhere in Shetland, Paul Adderley presented soil analysis results from Papa Stour that indicated an excessive use of manure on cultivated land, thereby denuding 'outfield' areas of potential grazing value and causing a systemic collapse that was avoidable. The Papa Stour study was one of several papers that showed how soil micromorphology and related analyses can serve to bring together lines of investigation that would otherwise be based on quite different forms of evidence, so encouraging the integration of results and ideas. It was also, incidentally, one of seven papers for which Ian Simpson was listed as a co-author, despite presenting none of them: is this an AEA record?

The Outer Hebrides were well represented, in particular by papers stemming from work on South Uist, and from the Calanais and Bostadh projects on Lewis. Like Myvatn, the various Hebridean papers ranged from a regional overview of settlement patterns (Niall Sharples, with a hand-drawn overhead to gladden the Powerpoint resistance movement!), through discussion of economic models (Helen Smith and Jacqui Mulville) to studies of fuel resources by way of soil analyses (Clare Peters et al.). And fish, of course, with Ruby Cerron-Carrasco providing genuine food for thought with an unexpected predominance of herring in Norse deposits at Bostadh Beach.

Three excellent papers on Saturday morning comprised an Irish mini-session, reviewing different aspects of the arrival into Ireland of domestic livestock (Anne Tresset), insects (Nicki Whitehouse and Eileen Riley), and vertebrates in general (Peter Woodman). The message from all three papers was that much of what we think we know on these topics is either demonstrably wrong or certainly unreliable, and that well-stratified, closely-dated assemblages are throwing up important new evidence and ideas. Woodman, in particular, raised the subject of land-bridges, and so of sea level movement. One of the oddities of the conference was the disparity in the importance granted to sea levels. Two Canadian papers demonstrated very clearly the priority of establishing prehistoric coastal topography to put sites in their contemporary setting, and to enable predictive topographic survey, as at Port au Choix. For Britain, Paul Davies reviewed sea level change and its effect on resource availability in the Somerset Levels, and the topic resurfaced, so to speak, in Vanessa Straker's review of recent work in the Scilly Isles. However, the Hebrides and Shetland papers gave little more than passing mention to the subject, even though both regions have clearly experienced appreciable sea level movement during the Holocene, with evident implications for resources, salinisation, and movement within archipelagoes. Granted, the scale of sea level movement around South Uist or Scatness might not have been as great as at Prince Edward Island, but it was not negligible. Bearing in mind the important points that Davies made about the biotic productivity of shorelines during transgressions and regressions, sea level movement and its consequences clearly have to be worked into resource models for the Northern and Western Isles.

And there was much, much more, from ship-borne voles roaming the Atlantic sea-board, to

the wanderings and utilisation of driftwood, to a fascinating chain of inference from fish otoliths, by way of growth curves for medieval North Sea fish, to the development of the Flemish North Atlantic fishery. The conference showed two things in particular: first, that archaeology around the North Atlantic rim largely is environmental archaeology; and second, that it is in a healthy state, with ample scope for the exchange and development of ideas and methodologies. That, of course, is NABO's raison d'être, and one minor gripe regarding the conference must be that the very full programme led to discussion time being squeezed out by even a minor over-run on papers. Ironically, the biggest single cause of papers over-running seemed to be the fiendishly state-of-the-art projection controls, in an otherwise excellent lecture theatre. Discussion clearly went on over coffee and lunch, and probably during the two evening receptions that punctuated the academic programme. Perhaps there is a case for reserving the last session of each conference for a plenary discussion of a limited set of topics, proposed as the conference goes on? Given fierce chairing, and some pre-primed discussants, such a session could draw the conference to a lively and constructive close. It might even have overcome the fatigue that was beginning to show by the end of three days, as we struggled to come to terms with loom weights.

Thanks and congratulations are due to Geraint Coles, Rupert Housley, and John Duncan for setting up and running a conference that combined a rich academic content with a relaxed ambience, and for widening the customary AEA diet whilst retaining a focus. The published proceedings will be a valuable contribution to the burgeoning North Atlantic literature: much more than a mere drop in the ocean.

Terry O'Connor
Department of Archaeology, University of York.

PUBLICATIONS

[[Books](#) - [Theses](#) - [Chapters](#) - [Articles](#)]

We are very grateful, as ever, to James Greig for his publication list.

Many thanks to Margaret Atherden, Wendy Carruthers, Marianne Kohler-Schneider, Simone Riehl, Manfred Rösch, Anaya Sarpaki, Wendy Smith and Elaine Turner for sending in references. Please keep sending them to: greigjra@bham.ac.uk

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