

News story: Human skull found by dog walker sheds light on Somerset's history

An important historical find has been made in Somerset when a Langport dog walker found a well-preserved human skull.

Roger Evans of Newtown found the skull along the banks of the River Sowy in March 2017. The skull was reported to the police and analysed. After several months the results revealed it belonged to a woman aged 45 or older during the late Iron Age (380-190BC) – several centuries before the first Roman invasion of Britain.

The discovery hinted there may be more clues in the area, so in December the Environment Agency reduced water levels where the remains were found so South West Heritage Trust and the agency's own archeologist could investigate.

No other human remains were found, but the archaeologists discovered that the skull lay close to a series of round, timber posts driven deep into the river bed. These may be the remnant of a causeway or raised walkway and more posts could still survive hidden in the mud. Radio carbon dating of the posts is being carried out to see if they and the skull are of the same date. Further groups of posts were seen further down the channel, suggesting other prehistoric wooden structures are present nearby.

The Environment Agency returned water levels to normal to provide a measure of protection to the timber posts and any other archaeological remains still in the channel.

Stephen Dean, Environment Agency archaeologist, said:

The chance discovery on the banks of the River Sowy has shone fresh light on Somerset's hidden history. It has already added valuable information to the Somerset Historic Environment Record and reinforced our connections with the South West Heritage Trust.

The Environment Agency's future work on the River Sowy, carried out on behalf of the Somerset Rivers Authority, will be informed by past discoveries such as these and will look to capture more of the area's rich historical and archaeological story.

The discovery of the Sowy Skull is also a poignant reminder that, in looking to the future, the work we do must be informed by an understanding and respect for Somerset's rich cultural and natural

heritage. Only by understanding this heritage can we hope to leave it a condition fit for generations to come.

Analysis by a human bone expert showed that the female skull suffered considerably from gum disease and tooth loss. Her diet included coarse material, which had unevenly worn her remaining teeth, and resulted in severe osteoarthritis in the joint of her right jaw. She had also suffered at least one episode of chronic illness or nutritional stress during childhood. The woman's head appears to have been deliberately removed at, or shortly after death.

Richard Brunning, the South West Heritage Trust archaeologist, said:

Severed heads are not an unusual discovery for the Iron Age, but the placement of the skull in a wetland beside a wooden structure is very rare, possibly reflecting a practice of making ritual offerings in watery environments.

Notes to editors:

The South West Heritage Trust is an independent charity committed to protecting and celebrating Somerset and Devon's rich heritage. As well as the widely-praised Museum of Somerset and the redeveloped Somerset Rural Life Museum, in Glastonbury, the Trust manages state-of-the-art facilities in Taunton and Exeter to care for the extraordinary archive collections of the two counties. The Trust also provides essential advice about the historic environment and manages historic sites. Visit www.swheritage.org.uk/.

Archeologists first delved into the wetlands between Burtle, Westhay and close to Glastonbury in the nineteenth century. In the Neolithic and Bronze Age. Farmers made wooden trackways to cross the wetlands of the Levels and Moors area, and also occasionally deposited valuable objects and human remains in the shallow waters. By the Iron Age, some settlements were actually made in the wetland – the Glastonbury and Meare Lake Villages – which could only be reached by dug-out canoes.

Work commissioned by the Environment Agency at Steart Marshes at the mouth of the River Parrett has shown the presence of Iron Age farming communities on the Steart peninsula. Studies there, and further along the Parrett, have shown that the floodplain was constantly changing in response to sea level rise, climate change, and human activity.

A community excavation by the South West Heritage Trust on the nearby 'island' of hard geology in the floodplain at Aller, discovered Iron Age defences and numerous circular pits for storing grain. The island may have acted as a defensive refuge from attacks and would have overlooked the wetlands where the skull was deposited.

[News story: Boston Barrier tidal flood defence construction begins](#)

Floods Minister Thérèse Coffey has marked the start of works on the £100 million Boston Barrier flood defence, breaking ground on an Environment Agency scheme that will protect 14,000 homes and businesses from tidal flooding.

Work is already underway to dredge more than 5,000 cubic metres of silt from the Boston Haven to make way for construction. Over the coming months, 2,000 tonnes of steel sheeting – weighing as much as 280 elephants – will be put in place to strengthen the riverbanks in preparation for the barrier.

Floods Minister Thérèse Coffey said:

This Government investment will make sure Boston is one of the best protected towns on the east coast and I am proud to be putting the first spade in the ground on this project.

The Boston Barrier is part of our plan to invest £229 million over the next four years to make sure the risk of flooding to 49,000 homes and businesses in Lincolnshire is significantly reduced.

It is expected that works will be complete by the end of 2020, and will make Boston one of the best-protected areas from tidal flooding outside of London.

The scheme will feature a moveable gate across the River Witham together with a new control building to operate the barrier, new flood defence walls on both banks and a replacement gate across the entrance to the existing Port of Boston wet dock.

Toby Willison, Executive Director of Operations at the Environment Agency, said:

This state-of-the-art defence will help protect Boston's communities and businesses from the kind of flooding the town experienced in December 2013.

It's yet another example of the brilliant work our teams are doing up and down the country to better protect people from flooding, and recently we've reached a milestone of an extra 100,000 homes protected.

The barrier's 25-metre wide hydraulic-powered gate, when not in use, will lay

flat on the riverbed out of sight, but will be raised to close off the River Witham when flooding is expected, preventing high tides on the North Sea from raising river levels in the town.

Boston has a long history of tidal flooding, most recently in December 2013 when more than 800 properties flooded across 55 streets. Flooding also occurred in 1953 and 1978.

The Environment Agency is investing £2.6 billion of government funding in more than 1,500 flood defences to protect homes and businesses across the country by 2021.

Everyone has a responsibility to take steps to protect themselves from flooding, such as knowing your risk, signing up for free flood warnings and making a floodplan in advance. Call Floodline on 0345 988 1188 or visit www.gov.uk/flood for more information.

Press release: Chance to shape Lincolnshire's coastal flood risk strategy

The Environment Agency (EA) is launching a consultation on Monday 5 February on its strategy options to manage coastal flood risk between Saltfleet and Gibraltar Point over the next 100 years.

The EA's current flood defence work along this stretch of Lincolnshire's coastline reduces flood risk for 20,000 residential homes, 1,700 businesses, 24,500 static caravans, 35,000 hectares of farmland and a bustling tourist industry.

This consultation will help the EA form a new strategy that will continue to manage coastal flood risk in the most sustainable way, keeping pace with climate change. The new strategy will go to consultation later this year.

The EA has worked with partners and stakeholders to reduce a long-list of possible coastal flood risk management options to a shortlist of six options, which are now being taken forward to public consultation.

All of the options being considered for consultation include a form of beach 'nourishment', the process of putting extra sand on beaches to restore levels lost naturally to the sea. This is currently one of the key ways in which the EA manages coastal flood risk along Lincolnshire's coastline. Full details on each of the options are available [online](#) and will also be displayed at the public drop-in events which will be held over the coming weeks.

A full Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is being carried out to assess the environmental impact of the strategy. The SEA will make sure the EA can continue to manage coastal flood risk without negatively affecting the vast array of valuable habitats, species, landscapes and seascapes that Lincolnshire's coastline has to offer.

This consultation is open for a six week period and invites everyone to get involved and share their views. The consultation starts on 5 February 2018. Submissions can be made online, at one of the public drop-ins or through a postal consultation form which can be requested by calling 0208 4749987.

Commenting on the consultation, EA Flood and Coastal Risk manager Deborah Campbell said:

This strategy review will help us continue to manage coastal flood risk for thousands of homes, businesses and static caravans as well as agricultural land and a vibrant tourist industry in Lincolnshire's coastal communities over the next 100 years.

In the lead-up to this consultation we worked with partners and stakeholders, including a number of elected representatives, to help us reduce a long-list of options for flood risk management on this stretch of the coast to a shorter list of six.

This consultation process will allow the coastal communities we serve along Lincolnshire's coastline to get involved and have their say. The process will enable us to gather invaluable information and allow us to make an informed decision on how we will manage coastal flood risk between Saltfleet and Gibraltar Point over the next 100 years.

The following public drop-in events have been scheduled. Registration for these events is not necessary; simply show up on the day.

- 14 February 2018, 2pm-7pm at Bacchus Hotel, 17 High St Sutton on Sea LN122EY
 - 16 February 2018, 10am-4pm at Gibraltar Point Visitors Centre, Gibraltar Road, Skegness PE244ST
 - 21 February 2018, 2pm-7pm at Embassy Theatre, Grand Parade, Skegness PE252UG
 - 23 February 2018, 2pm-7pm at Village Hall, Sea Road, Anderby PE245YD
 - 27 February 2018, 2pm-7pm at Methodist Church, Main Road, Saltfleet LN117TP
 - 5 March 2018, 2.30pm-7.30pm at Village Hall, 28 Sea Road, Chapel St Leonards PE245SA
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[Press release: New multi-million pound flood scheme in Birmingham opened](#)

The scheme, which cost £2.7million to construct, has been delivered as part of the Environment Agency's programme of £2.5bn investment into flood defences across the country. The scheme was made possible through a partnership with Birmingham City Council and St Andrew's Healthcare.

The flood defences include a 500m long embankment on the public open space next to Dogpool Lane bridge. By doing this, the Environment Agency has created a flood storage area which will store water from the River Rea during times of heavy rainfall and then slowly release it back into the river when river water levels go down. The Environment Agency have also built a new flood wall and a higher river bank at the rear of 15 homes which back onto the river.

Mike Adams from the Environment Agency said:

We're pleased to deliver these flood protection measures for the people of Selly Park South. This community has experienced the terrible effects of flooding and the measures we've built here reduces future risk of flooding. We would like to thank local people for their patience and support throughout the building of this scheme.

Councillor Lisa Trickett, Cabinet Member for the Environment from Birmingham City Council said:

We've seen the devastating impact that flooding can have on communities, so I am delighted that these new measures are now in place. These will make a real difference by reducing the risk of flooding to hundreds of homes and businesses in Selly Park South.

Along with flood defences, knowing your flood risk is also important when protecting your family and property from flooding. People can [check their risk](#) and [register to receive free flood warnings](#) online or call Floodline on 0345 988 1188.

[News story: CC Haulage & Sons Ltd to](#)

pay £109,000 for dumping on Devon farms

A Devon haulage and site clearance company faces a bill of more than £100,000 for dumping thousands of tonnes of soil and stone on farmland. The case was brought by the Environment Agency.

CC Haulage & Sons Ltd is a family owned and run company based at Manor Farm, Colebrooke, Crediton. The two directors are Colin Clarke and his wife, Deborah Clarke.

Farmers are allowed to accept up to 1,000 tonnes of non-hazardous waste including soil and stone under a permission known as an 'exemption' that is commonly used on farms to construct hard-standings, bases for buildings and tracks and doesn't need an environmental permit.

In November 2016 the Environment Agency visited Beech Down Farm in Tedburn St Mary where waste was being tipped in a valley. Inquiries revealed that CC Haulage had deposited 7,820 tonnes of waste at the farm. Excessive quantities of waste, much of it from building and construction sites, had also been tipped at 3 other Devon farms at Longdown, Exeter, Yeoford and Crediton.

The offences came to light after the Environment Agency examined waste transfer notes that identified CC Haulage as the source of the excessive amounts of waste material. The company benefitted financially by paying the farmers less to accept the waste than it was charging its clients to take the material away.

The firm's defence said CC Haulage believed the farmers had the necessary permits to accept the waste, but admitted the company should have checked.

Richard Cloke of the Environment Agency said:

Haulage businesses must ensure they comply with the limits and conditions of environmental permits and exemptions.

These are in place to stop the illegal deposit of waste, protect the environment and create a level playing field for the waste industry.

Appearing at Exeter Crown Court, CC Haulage & Sons Ltd was fined £14,000 and ordered to pay £5,000 costs. Judge Geoffrey Mercer also imposed a £90,000 Proceeds of Crime confiscation order at the sentencing hearing on 15 January 2018. The company must pay back this figure from the profits it made from its criminal activities.

Judge Mercer said: "It is not entirely clear to me how the company were unclear about the limits."