

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.

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[News story: Collaborating to support marine licence applications from the subsea cable sector](#)

The Marine Management Organisation's (MMO) Marine Licensing Team have worked with the European Subsea Cables Association (ESCA) to develop a desk note to assist with marine licence applications.

Trudi Wakelin MMO Director of Marine Licensing said:

We worked closely with ESCA in developing this desk note to make sure that the content is of value to the cable industry and that the information contained in it gives a clear understanding of what applicants need to do to achieve licences.

This demonstrates the benefits of working together to achieve the common goals of economic growth and environmental protection.

Peter Jamieson, Chair of ESCA said:

ESCA welcomes this publicly available desk note, which will ensure consistency for both applicant and regulator.

This desk note provides an overview of the subsea cable sector, the relevant legislation, a description of the different types of cable, the main methods of cable installation, as well as the key impacts to be considered in a subsea cable application.

The full desk note is available on the [ESCA website](#).

[A date for your dairy](#)

The increasingly important role played by state-of-the-art technology in Scotland's dairy industry will be explored in a special open farm event in Dumfries.