



Archaeology in Hertfordshire: Recent Research. A Festschrift for Tony Rook, edited by Kris Lockyear

Adrian M. Chadwick

To cite this article: Adrian M. Chadwick (2017) Archaeology in Hertfordshire: Recent Research. A Festschrift for Tony Rook, edited by Kris Lockyear, Archaeological Journal, 174:2, 510-511, DOI: [10.1080/00665983.2017.1319131](https://doi.org/10.1080/00665983.2017.1319131)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00665983.2017.1319131>



Published online: 10 May 2017.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 13



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Britain and how this transformed over time (questions 1, 2, and 6) and the extent to which the sea provided a barrier or a physical link in different periods (question 7). However, it is difficult to understand how questions 3, 4, and 5 could be answered in this volume (p. 15):

- ‘3. Would scientific studies of human bones suggest that people really had travelled from one part of the study area to another?
4. How important was the movement of portable artefacts?
5. Do they provide evidence for the distribution of valuable commodities, or were they associated with alliances which involved the exchange of marriage partners?’ (p. 15).

Neither portable artefacts nor the scientific analysis of human remains were directly examined. The marginal significance of material culture is aptly demonstrated by the total absence of any finds illustration in the volume.

The book is finished with a concluding chapter entitled ‘The Research in Retrospect’ but the detailed synthesis of the evidence presented is minimal. The conclusion argues that:

‘there were two periods in which the British Isles had little contact with the Continent: the late Mesolithic when they were cut off by the sea and the late fourth to early third millennia BC when some extraordinary monuments of purely insular kinds were built. At other times long-distance connections are clearly documented in north-west Europe. From the Beaker period onwards there seems to have been a constant interchange between communities around the Channel and the southern North Sea.... Meanwhile, there were equally close contacts between communities along the Atlantic coast’ (p. 334).

This conclusion clearly addresses some of the research questions but I am not sure it represents a major reinterpretation of the relationship between Britain and the Continent. The other topics considered in the conclusion include examinations of the demography of the period, climate change, social evolution, and the dichotomy between settlement and burial monuments, but these are not in-depth analyses and none of them explicitly relate to the work undertaken by this volume. This left the reader with a sense of disappointment and a feeling that the opportunity to produce a new synthesis has been missed.

NIALL SHARPLES

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00665983.2017.1294914>

© 2017, Niall Sharples

ARCHAEOLOGY IN HERTFORDSHIRE: RECENT RESEARCH. A FESTSCHRIFT FOR TONY ROOK. Edited by KRIS LOCKYEAR. Pp. xviii and 356, Illus 104. The Welwyn Archaeological Society, 2015. Price: £20.00. ISBN 978-1-909291-42-3.

This collection of fourteen research papers, with a preface and an introduction, is derived from a conference organized by the Welwyn Archaeological Society to mark the eightieth birthday of Tony Rook, a prominent local archaeologist and historian.

In the preface, Kris Lockyear provides a short biography of Tony Rook, and then in Chapter 1 examines the historical development of archaeology in Hertfordshire, linking it to trends such as increased urbanization and industry, and post-war population growth. Lockyear outlines reasons why the county’s archaeology differs to that of surrounding areas, including a lack of good-quality building stone, whether for stone circles or medieval castles. This sets the scene for those (including this author) unfamiliar with much of the Hertfordshire evidence.

In Chapter 2, using entries from the diary of Merle Rook (Tony’s partner of many years), Lockyear writes an affecting account of the origins of the Welwyn Archaeological Society, of which Tony and Merle were founder members. This might seem a niche paper, yet it provides insights into the trials

and triumphs of ‘rescue’ archaeology during the 1960s and 1970s, and illustrates the institutional prejudices against so-called ‘amateur’ archaeologists at that time.

Chapter 3 by Bryant examines the evidence for later prehistoric settlement in Hertfordshire during 1500–300 BC, including a useful round-up of results from developer-funded archaeology. There remain problems with dating, particularly with Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age sites and pottery assemblages, and the need for routine radiocarbon dating and more detailed ceramic analyses is clear. The recent identification of possible later prehistoric coaxial field systems is noteworthy, as some lie on clay soils previously dismissed as unsuitable for agriculture, but which might have supported pastoral regimes. Although some wider patterns across Hertfordshire are evident, there are also many local variations too. One such area is investigated in detail by Fitzpatrick-Matthews in Chapter 4, around Baldock and Letchworth Garden City. He summarizes the known archaeology of monuments such as the Nortonbury cursus, Norton henge, and the Baldock *oppidum*. As with Chapter 3, the local evidence is tied in to wider theoretical debates about prehistoric practices and communities.

A stand-out paper is Chapter 5 by Burleigh, which examines the Iron Age and Romano-British landscapes around Baldock. This proposes that the location of temples, shrines, and coin and metalwork hoards marked the boundaries of a *civitas*. The importance of ditches, dykes, and depositional practices in marking social and spiritual boundaries is stressed, and this is a paper which has much wider significance. In Chapter 6, Isobel Thompson discusses the ‘missing’ Middle Iron Age (though Haselgrove and Pope suggest this is an unhelpful term in their Introduction to their 2007 volume, *The Earlier Iron Age in Britain and the Near Continent*), and the early years of Roman settlement. Chapters 7 and 8 by Moorhead and Wythe, respectively, both focus on Roman coin hoards from Hertfordshire, the former from a numismatic perspective, whilst the latter interrogates the landscape and contextual evidence. Again, these both have wider significance. In Chapter 10, West investigates the impact of ‘Romanization’ on the Verulamium area, but inevitably, there are some overlaps with Chapter 6. Chapter 11 by Boyer et al. seems a little out of place, as it is essentially a report of developer-funded investigations at Watton-on-Stone, which would normally be published in a county archaeology and history journal. Whilst Lockyear (Chapter 1) explained that there are problems with the regular publication of *Hertfordshire Archaeology*, the inclusion of this paper still seems odd. It is an interesting site with prehistoric pits and Anglo-Saxon funerary remains, but one wonders if Pre-Construct Archaeology, the consultants, or the developers, wished to avoid paying for publication elsewhere.

The emphasis then shifts to later periods, with Chapter 12 by Baker examining Hertfordshire hundred place-names, and Williamson (Chapter 13) outlining the evidence for medieval and post-medieval field systems and agriculture. In Chapter 14, Rowe focuses on pollards, and on how surviving trees can inform landscape historians. This is another paper with wider resonances. In the final Chapter, Dhanjal et al. narrate the background to the *Dig Where We Stand and Continuing to Dig* community archaeology projects, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Heritage Lottery Fund, and led by the University College London and the Welwyn Archaeological Society.

The illustrations are mostly of good quality, and there is a nice set of colour plates in the centre of the volume. In Chapter 4, however, several sections are reproduced without scales, which renders these images less useful. Some edited *festschrift* volumes can be highly variable in terms of quality and content, but although this collection has some papers that are stronger than others, (and perhaps there are one or two too many), there is less of an imbalance here. Kris Lockyear is to be applauded for his editing of an attractive and reasonably priced volume, worthy of a wider readership than those interested solely in Hertfordshire’s fascinating past.

ADRIAN M. CHADWICK

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00665983.2017.1319131>

© 2017, Adrian M. Chadwick