

Using a current archaeological research framework (regional or thematic), contextualise and synthesise data and results from an agreed archaeological project

Introduction:

The site discussed in this essay is the excavation of Longstone Edge, a Neolithic/Bronze Age barrow in the Peak District, Derbyshire. This project has only recently been deposited on the ADS (https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/longstone_he_2020/index.cfm), though excavation took place in 1995-1996 and post-analysis was completed between 2002 and 2019 (due to budget constraints). It presents an interesting case study in regards to research frameworks, as the initial excavation pre-dates modern frameworks, but the final report and some of the post-ex analysis was completed after the relevant frameworks were created. This essay will cover how research frameworks can be used to discuss and contextualise a site, highlight the benefits and limitations of basing a project around a framework and looks at how the site of Longstone Edge fits into the East Midlands Regional Framework.

The Longstone Edge project successfully works towards many of the aims and objectives outlined in the 2012 *East Midlands Heritage: An Updated Research Agenda and Strategy for the Historic Environment of the East Midlands* (Knight et al.), which was created two years before the final report (available on ADS) was published (Last et al. 2014). It addresses several of the gaps and research questions identified in the framework, particularly around Neolithic funerary traditions. Additionally, it touches on more general aims for the region, such as archiving a legacy project and making its scientific data easily accessible by uploading to the ADS. Overall the project does a good job at working within the framework, despite the majority of the project being completed in the mid-1990s to mid-2000s.

What is a Framework?

There are multiple types of frameworks, such as regional or thematic. For this project there is a relatively up to date and extensive regional framework (Knight et al. 2012). While the essay will focus on this framework, other relevant frameworks exist such as the pre-history framework (Historic England 2010), which is national but specific to the time period. This could be used to bring the site into a more national context but is less tailored to the local area.

Frameworks range from the hyper-specific, (e.g. focusing on an individual finds type like the roman pottery framework (Willis 2004)) to the extremely broad. Project managers/directors should be aware of how their site might fit into any applicable frameworks (Lee 2006). An integral part to making sure that this requirement is met is bringing specialists in at the initialisation stage so that every aspect of the project is planned with the relevant frameworks in mind (including post-ex).

The broader purpose of a research framework is to help direct the aims of the project. It is trying to ensure that any work done contributes to our wider knowledge and answering open questions. It is impossible for archaeologists to sample or record everything, so the methods of a project need to be driven by larger aims, making sure that any data and information gathered on site is contributing towards core aims/research questions; frameworks exist to inform these aims.

While frameworks are useful, they are not a panacea and have their limitations. They are inherently a one-size-fits all document within the archaeology industry, despite this being divided into many different sectors (e.g. academic, commercial and government). These sectors all have differing goals and drivers (Smith and Pye 2014). One should not expect that the entirety of the framework should be applicable to each site. It should be viewed as a guide helping to inform the direction of the project

rather than providing exact aims for the site. When reading a framework it should be considered that it is very general in terms of a period, region or sector it was written to address. However, when used correctly a major benefit of frameworks is that all these disparate sectors are working on shared aims and knowledge gained from one can flow into and inform the others.

Case study: Longstone Edge

The excavation of Longstone Edge will be discussed in relation to the East Midlands Heritage Research Framework. The site falls within the region addressed by this and Derbyshire is mentioned frequently as an area of particular interest. The aims of the framework can be split into two broad categories:

1. The Research Objectives/Agenda - i.e. specific questions about the archaeology that have yet to be answered and how we might go about this.
2. Building the Research Foundations - i.e. how to carry out archaeology to maximise its impact.

While Longstone Edge covers a range of periods, for the purposes of this essay, discussion of how it meets the framework goals will be limited to the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age data. The discussion is divided into the objectives identified by the framework which are relevant to the site.

Research Objective 3A

The research framework outlines the need for Bayesian statistics when analysing radiocarbon dates in the region. It outlines the need to apply this technique to past sites due to the level of information it can add to radiocarbon dates. The research framework also suggests the benefit of the method for monuments dating to the early Neolithic period with complex and lengthy phasing, a perfect fit for Longstone (Knight et al. 2012). This perfect fit was not missed by the radiocarbon specialist who conducted a Bayesian analysis for the radiocarbon dates produced for the site in the early 2000s (Marshall et al. 2002). This has allowed the interpretation that there was mortuary activity predating the construction of Barrow 1, dated the cist burials pre-2000 BC and the Food Vessel cremation post-2000 BC. In addition the Early Bronze Age burials in Barrows 1 and 2 have been interpreted as possibly contemporary (Marshall et al. 2002).

Research Objective 3F

The framework cites 'it is important to identify surviving examples, establish the variety of monuments and ensure that appropriate curatorial decisions can be made concerning their preservation' (Knight et al. 2012, 53). The excavation was initially funded due to immediate threats caused to the site by quarrying. The site was not a scheduled monument and therefore had very limited protections in place. The results highlighted a significant amount of fissuring on the site and only 80% of the site could be excavated/sampled due to the fissuring and cliff collapse. In the areas excavated the fissuring also had a significant impact on the archaeological context horizons, making it much more difficult to create reliable stratigraphic chronologies and interpret the site. This issue was particularly notable when it came to the interpretation of the burials, where in one instance a set of beads were separated from a burial by a two meter fissure, making it difficult to identify what their relationship was. As such this site fits neatly into the objective of the framework to ensure sites under threat are recorded. Since these excavations no protections have been put in place for the site (Derbyshire Historic Environment Record 2015a; 2015b).

Research Objective 3G

One of the core areas of interest for the framework is Early Neolithic funerary traditions. The site initially garnered media attention due to the initial interpretation that the burials were left exposed on a raised platform, dubbed "sky burials" by *The Guardian* (Wainwright 1996). Analysis of the human

bone did not find any evidence for this initial theory, and suggested that the good condition and lack of carnivore gnawing on the bones made it unlikely. The specialist results suggest that the bones were less disturbed than first thought, and conformed more to traditional barrow burials (Mays 2002).

Research Objective 3H

The framework around skeletal remains from the Mesolithic to Early Bronze Age highlights a lack of known examples from the Mesolithic, and even where more examples are known from the Neolithic/Early Bronze Age these often lack further detailed analysis. The framework recommends that 'radiocarbon dating of human remains should be conducted as a matter of routine, with appropriate application of Bayesian modelling' (Knight et al. 2012, 55), as described under objective 3A this was conducted for the skeletal remains. The site is unusual in that the human remains recovered represent a wide spectrum of the population, making them a valuable source of information on Neolithic remains (Knight et al. 2012). The project perhaps did not use as wide array of scientific methods as the framework suggests, however the analysis was carried out prior to the framework, and the radiocarbon work goes some ways towards this.

Research Objective 3J

The framework outlines the need for more detailed artefact analysis e.g. through the increased use of residue analyses of pottery. Organic residue analysis has been particularly insightful for the Longstone Food Vessel cremation burial; this identified a strong presence of dairy lipids which Šoberl notes as present in other Early Bronze Age funerary vessels. The organic residues of domestic pottery on the other hand originate from a wider range of sources including meat, dairy and plants, suggesting a particular significance of dairy in a funerary context (Šoberl and Evershed 2002).

Building the Research Foundations

The research framework is not only concerned with specific archaeological questions, but also seeks to identify and improve on current archaeological practice. This touches on areas outside of excavation such as community outreach, archiving and dissemination of knowledge.

The East Midlands Heritage Framework recommends involving local and community groups at various points within the document. However, this is inconsistent and usually positioned as something of an add-on rather than an integral aspect of the project. The Longstone Edge project aimed to carry out a lot of community engagement, however here you can see the issues that are created by this "add-on" approach. The project design shows that they produced a video and created information boards (Reeves 1996). However, all the work on these two sub-projects was very separate from the excavation itself, and therefore not included in the archive. This is in contrast to sites like the Newport ship burial, where these additional outputs, particularly those with educational value (such as videos) are being archived with the ADS (Nayling and Jones 2017). As long as these community outreach goals are treated as completely separate from the archaeology, they will not be regarded with the same level of importance when it comes to forming the final archive and are therefore less likely to be stored with a depositary like ADS, which maintains a long-lasting and easily accessible archive. For archaeology to increase its wider impact in society, it needs to be accessed and used by more than just professionals in the industry. It is particularly museums and heritage educational groups that should be able to easily access these resources. This is not just limited to detailing what was found at any given site, but also to the other resources that were created during the project (i.e. for school visits) that are currently not being re-used or further distributed and could be hugely beneficial.

The research framework also places a great deal of emphasis on the sharing of results rather than just the creation of the outputs. The framework in the region identifies the issue of unpublished or lack of

easily accessible results from fieldwork and projects. The framework calls for these to be published on online archives and indexes where these can be accessed digitally and freely. By publishing this project through the ADS and writing up the analysis report, the project is going a long way towards meeting this aspect and ensures that a project carried out before the turn of the millennium is widely accessible through the internet.

Additionally, the final report was published in *Derbyshire Archaeological Journal* (2014) and a paper was published in *Quaternary International* (Andrews and Fernandez-Jalvo 2012) based on the microfauna from the site. This is contributing towards the framework's goal of disseminating results in a more varied way (as opposed to only producing grey literature). The initial interpretations of the Longstone Edge project were also reported on in an article in *The Guardian* (Wainwright 1996). Newspapers are a particularly effective avenue for reaching a non-professional audience, due to their wide readership and significant credibility. The framework doesn't mention social media, however on a more modern site one would expect this as a key tool to enhance the impact of the site.

Conclusion:

In summary the project contributes towards questions posited in the research framework. The excavation is particularly relevant to answering questions around Neolithic and Early Bronze Age funerary traditions. It also provides a good example for engaging the community and sharing results in a wide and varied manner, meeting professional standards, but also reaching a non-professional audience. This project illustrates the importance of disseminating legacy projects. Clearly, these projects still hold value and will add to the understanding of current research questions. Longstone Edge can be used as a good-practice example of how this should be carried out.

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