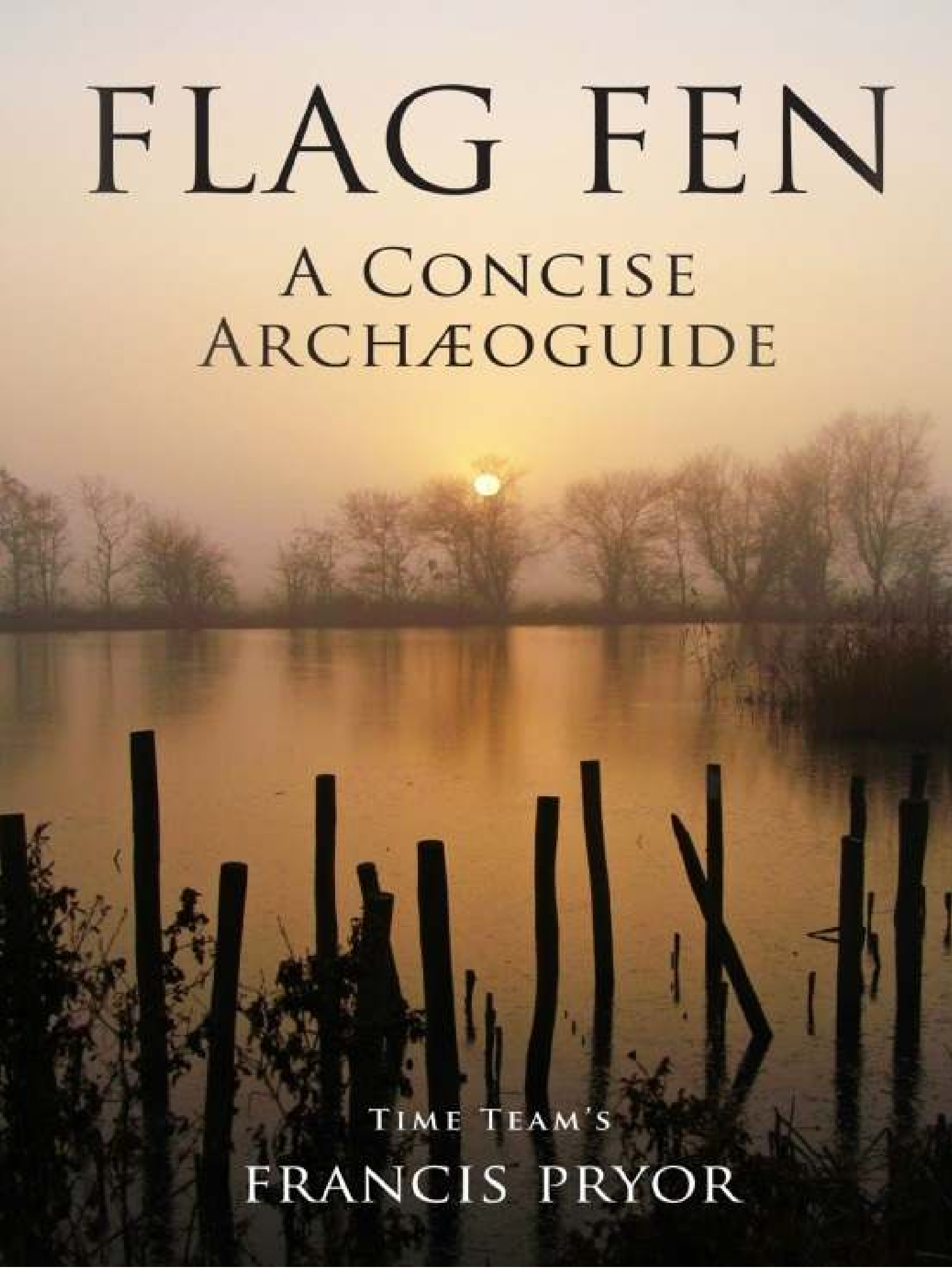
FLAG FEN

A CONCISE ARCHÆOGUIDE



TIME TEAM'S

FRANCIS PRYOR

Flag Fen: A Concise Archæoguide

Francis Pryor

Published by Boudicca Books, 2014.

CONTENTS

1. The Fens in a Nutshell

The Fens are a large area (about a million acres or 405,000 ha) of low-lying land around the Was
Today they occupy large parts of Lincolnshire and Cambridgeshire, with smaller areas in Norfolk an
Suffolk. In the past they were marshy and usually flooded in winter; but the modern landscape
entirely drained. Drainage began in early medieval times, but rapidly gathered pace in the seventeen
and eighteenth centuries. [1] To the east, closer to the Wash (and mostly in southern Lincolnshire) th
land that forms the Fens was laid-down by the sea, often in times of storm and flood. Driving acro
these landscapes today, the soil is pale, hence their name: the Silt Fens. This is some of the fine
agricultural land in Britain which now grows huge acreages of flowers and vegetables. By contras
Flag Fen sits at the western edge of the Peat or Black Fens. Here the land has been formed by th
growth of freshwater peats, a process that began from about 3000BC, when the rivers that drained in
the Fenland basin would flood. [2] Usually this was in winter and spring. Flag Fen was a ‘bay’ of lov
lying, waterlogged land immediately south-east of Peterborough. To the east and west the lan
gradually rises and becomes flood-free. The dry land to the east of the wet Flag Fen basin is known
Fengate, that to the west as Northey. Fengate lies at the edge of what one might think of as ‘mainlan
England; Northey is part of a large ‘island’ in the Fens, which includes the market town of Whittlese

2. Background: The Landscape of Flag Fen

The archaeological site known today as Flag Fen was completely unknown before its discovery November 1982. Before that it had lain concealed beneath almost two metres of peat and river-bor flood clay, known as alluvium, which started to cover it up sometime in the later Iron Age, over 200 years ago. But the discovery did not happen by chance. Like many archaeological finds, this one can to light as the culmination of many years of patient and painstaking research.

The story began in 1970 when I happened to read in an archaeological magazine that Peterborou New Town was to be extended eastwards to cover the known archaeological site of Fengate. At th time I worked for the Royal Ontario Museum, in Toronto, Canada, and I was in England trying to fi a suitable site for a future series of excavations. And Fengate looked very promising indeed. So returned to Peterborough the following year with a small team of Canadian students and recruited a equal number from various British universities. That first season revealed what we now know to hav been one of Britain's earliest Bronze Age field systems and the results were so good that our Canadia sponsors, together with the old Inspectorate of Ancient Monuments at what was to become th Department of the Environment (the forerunner of English Heritage), decided to back us for the ne few years. By the end of the project, in 1979 we had revealed a remarkable story.

The first farmers arrived in the area sometime around 4000BC and clearance of trees and woodlan from the landscape was well under way by 3000BC. That was when a series of Neolithic shrines an other features, which may have been arranged along an ancient route way were constructed. The finds included a rather tragic grave which held the bodies of a man and a woman and (possibly thei two children. The man had been killed by a flint arrowhead which we found lodged between his eigh and ninth ribs. That burial is on display in Peterborough Museum. Some five centuries later, aroun 2500BC, at the start of the Bronze Age, the earlier farmed landscape was carefully divided-up into on of the first field systems in Britain. The fields were marked-out by ditches, banks and hedges and we laid out at right angles to the developing wetland. They were subdivided into blocks of land that we separated by double-ditched droveways (for livestock), which ran down to the wetland edge. The fields too were intended for the use of animals, mostly cattle and sheep. The farmers themselves live in small, isolated single farmsteads dispersed through the fields. Much later, excavations in the 1990 and early 2000s revealed that there were closely similar landscapes of ditched fields further along th fen-edge towards the village of Eye and on the other side of the Flag Fen basin, on the edge Whittlesey 'island', at Northey.

3. The Discovery of Flag Fen

By the start of 1979 our team had finished excavating at Fengate and work on the modern factori that now cover most of Fengate, or the Eastern Industrial Area as it is now known, could begin i earnest. By then I had moved back to England and for two years I immersed myself in the business writing-up our results, which were published in four reports. [3] We then began a series of excavation in the Welland valley, some ten miles north of Peterborough. Towards the end of those excavation between 1982 and 1986 we began a series of research surveys in which we carefully examined th sides of newly machine-cleaned Fen drainage ditches, or dykes. [4]

Towards the end of the first season of dyke survey we discovered the timbers of an extraordinar Bronze Age site in a drainage dyke in the middle of Flag Fen. We made that discovery early i November and by Christmas we had revealed several hundred timbers which we found conceale within the sides of the dyke for a distance of about 80m. At one point they were overlain by a know Roman Road which was probably built in the mid-first century AD, and is known as the Fe Causeway. This was very useful as it told us that the road was later than the timbers beneath. But w also noticed there was about a metre of peats and alluvium separating the timbers from the road abov them. Now we knew that pre-Roman fenland deposits in the area were being laid-down very roughly the rate of about 1mm per annum, which would suggest that the timbers were approximately millennium earlier than the Roman road. This was confirmed shortly after Christmas, when Th British Museum rushed us through some radiocarbon dates, which confirmed that the timbers dated around 1000BC. [5]

The following summer we carried out an auger survey to determine how far the timbers extende back from the dyke. It was hard work, as in those days machine-powered augers were rare, so D Charles French and myself did the drilling by hand. In the end we proved that timber covered an are of about 150 by 150m arranged in a squashed oval. To our surprise, the dyke had only cut through small part of the platform. We called it a platform, because no other explanation seemed to mak sense. Even today we are far from certain about its original purposes.

The next big event in the discovery of Flag Fen took place in the summer of 1989 when the ga fired power station, that still dominates the site to the east, was built. As part of their work th contractors funded an excavation which we carried out. Many people, some even in the archaeologic world, thought it unnecessary as the construction was to take place some 800m east of the dyke whe seven years earlier we had revealed the timbers. But we insisted, and to their great credit (and wonder whether this would happen today?) the power station builders insisted that our work should g ahead - and they contributed generously towards it, too. It was a very hot, dry summer and hardly th best weather to dig waterlogged timbers, but at the end of it all we had discovered the Fengate landfa of a timber causeway which we could now trace right across Flag Fen from those posts we had foun back in ’82 on the platform, in the dykeside.

The highest level of timbers to one side of the post alignment

We had been carrying out detailed excavations around the posts in the dykeside because these wer

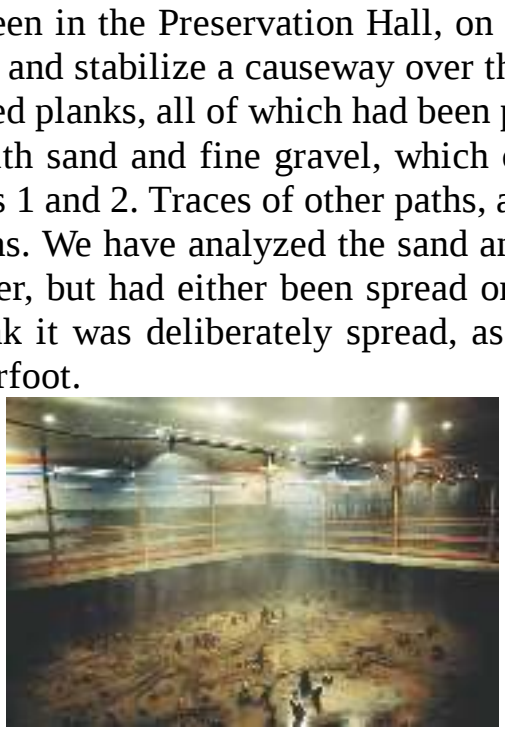
the most threatened by drying-out and in the course of that work we had found a handful of finds: few scrappy pieces of pottery, the odd flint, a bone or two – but that was all. These were sufficient tell us that the timbers indeed dated to the later Bronze Age – again, that was all. But the power stati site changed everything. A detailed metal-detector survey, which was carried out in partnership with local detectorists' club, revealed just short of 300 metal objects, the vast majority of which we Bronze Age. Almost everything from the Bronze Age metal-worker's repertoire was there: sword daggers, rapiers, spearheads, brooches, bracelets, pins, axes, chisels, awls. And the date range w quite clear too: roughly 1300 to 900BC, with a few finds dating to the Iron Age and even into Roma times. These dates were subsequently confirmed by tree-ring studies.

So far two major reports have been published. The first gives details of our research following t site's discovery in 1982, up until 1995. [6] The second describes the smaller, mostly universi training, excavations carried out between 1995 and 2007. [7]

4. The Post Alignment

We knew from our work in the ‘70s and ‘80s that the dry land on either side of the wetter, lowe lying parts Flag Fen basin had been settled and farmed from at least 3000BC, when most of the natur tree cover had also been removed. The lowest areas began to flood shortly after that date, as a result the warmer climate, and rising sea levels, that followed the end of the last ice age, some ten thousar years ago. It seems highly probable that the early Bronze Age inhabitants of the area had already lai out a route across the lowest land (which would probably have represented a flood hazard in times heavy rainfall) even if the larger Fens had yet to start forming. Rainwater will always pond in fla low-lying land, especially if the natural drainage is not too good. We found very slight evidence fo such a route when we had removed the last of the posts at the power station site, in 1989. It consiste of a shallow ditch that more-or-less followed the line of the later posts.

The big event took place sometime around 1300BC when a double row of posts was set in th ground in a near-straight line running east-west from Fengate to Northey, across the narrowest stret of wet ground they could find. These early posts were mainly of willow and alder, wet-loving tre that would have been growing locally. We’re still not certain of the precise chronology of wha happened next, but the first two rows (which we labeled Rows 1 and 3) were then augmented b another three, all of which can be seen in the Preservation Hall, on site. There can be no doubt at a that the posts were used to mark-out and stabilize a causeway over the wetland, because not only hav we found dozens of carefully arranged planks, all of which had been pegged into place, but the woode surface has been liberally dusted with sand and fine gravel, which can clearly be seen alongside th central post Row 3 and between rows 1 and 2. Traces of other paths, all running parallel with the post were observed during the excavations. We have analyzed the sand and gravel and can state positivel that it was not washed there by water, but had either been spread on the ground, or had got there o people’s feet. On the whole we think it was deliberately spread, as it includes some larger pebble Wet wood can be very slippery underfoot.



The Preservation Hall

At its Fengate landfall the causeway precisely lines up with a pre-existing ditched droveway. Th Fengate Bronze Age landscape was parcelled-up into fields which were separated into individu farms or holding by tracks known in the Fens as droveways. Droveways became even more importa in the Middle Ages when they were used to drove or drive large herds of cattle or sheep from remo farms out in the fen, to the main markets, at towns like Boston, March, Wisbech, Holbeach an Spalding. The Fengate droves were smaller in scale – none were longer than a kilometer – but the served much the same purpose: to take livestock safely from A to B, without having them wander o into another person’s farm. We didn’t find evidence for another droveway at the Northey end of th causeway, which argues that animals as such did not use it. Common sense suggests that cattle woul soon damage their feet attempting to cross over on so much loose timber. Even though they a mountain animals, sheep, too, are very wary about walking over unstable surfaces. It would seem, the that the Flag Fen causeway was used only by people, and that they were probably on foot.

Various Flag Fen publications describe the posts as being part of a ‘post alignment’ rather than causeway. The reason for this is that the term causeway conjures up a relatively simple picture in th mind’s eye. Modern causeways are fairly basic: they’re a means of guiding people across wet boggy land, sometimes (but not always) dry shod. But there was far more to the Flag Fen causew than that. For a start it seems to have been built on an unnecessarily lavish scale, with no less than fiv rows of posts. The posts, too, are very large and many are made from oak, which must always hav been a very expensive raw material, as it is by far and away the best (i.e. longest lasting and stronges building material. We have also found one or two posts that either collapsed or were never used ar these suggest that at least a proportion of posts could have been very high – and would have stood 1 12ft (over 3.5m) above the surrounding Fen. So they would have looked spectacular. There is also problem with ‘Row’ 4, whose posts don’t form a tight row, so much as a concentrated spread. Th row resembles more a military palisade than a line of guiding markers.

The final problem with the simple ‘causeway’ explanation has been the discovery of hundreds complete or recently broken objects around or close to the posts. These are not the sort of small, da to-day objects one might expect to have fallen out of travellers’ bags or pockets – the mode equivalents of Coke bottles, crisp packets and hamburger boxes. They are far more up-market ar include about a dozen bronze swords and daggers, bronze spearheads, brooches, pins, rings, fin turned shale bracelets and complete pottery vessels. There are other strange finds too, including fo almost unused corn grinding stones, or querns, together with a number of dog skulls. These fin strongly suggest that this over-elaborate, and possible defended ‘causeway’ also served an importa religious or ceremonial role. So we decided to use a new term to describe it: a post alignment.

Study of the growth-pattern of the tree rings of the oaks in the alignment gave us broad dates f phases of activity, but we encountered problems when it came to the linking of these general episod of building and rebuilding to the actual timbers themselves. This failure to provide a tightly dat structural sequence reflected the fact that most of the dated timbers were posts that had been drive down from the top. Further problems were caused by the fact that many of the posts had lost their ba and much of their sapwood, which made it impossible to arrive at actual dates, rather than date range Even so, we able to make a reasonably well-informed guess at the development of the post alignmen between 1300 and 900BC. In short, after a slow start the structure grows in complexity and remarkable robust, corduroy-like, layer of timbers, known as the ‘log layer’ was laid down to act as foundation that was not likely to sink. The layers above the ‘log layer’ were a succession of walkway mostly on either side of Row 3. As we have seen, the scattering of posts known as Row 4 may actual have formed an irregular wall or palisade of posts. The post alignment reverted to a simple footpath its latest phase, perhaps around 1000BC. There were also indications for an unexpected partitioning transverse element in at least one place where the post alignment crossed the platform. This may hav been a structural necessity, but other explanations (which I will discuss in the next section) are als possible.

Row 3

It was not until we had completed most of the post-excavation analyses, by 1996, that we were ab to plot the types of wood used at Flag Fen. The main conclusion was that fenland species, such alder and willow, occurred most frequently in the earliest phases of the structure. It was not until lat that oak began to be used at all frequently. This is not what one would have expected and may refle the site's growing importance, because oak is a valuable structural timber, which could not have bee grown in the wetland itself, and must have been transported to Flag Fen, either from the higher groun in the immediate vicinity, or from further afield. The preponderance of fenland species lower down the sequence doubtless reflects the fact that the alder carr woods around the edges of the Flag Fe basin had to be cleared, before construction of the post alignment and platform could begin.

The last timbers of the post alignment and platform were added shortly after 900BC, in the La Bronze Age, but the site of the alignment, which would still have been visible during the drier month of the year, continued to be visited, and offerings were made there throughout the Iron Age.

An impression of the post alignment by Rob Fuller

The Bronze Age fields at either end of the post alignment began to be abandoned from abou 1400BC, and there was a shift southwards, towards slightly higher ground. At the same time it is no becoming increasingly clear that the wetter parts of the basin were also rapidly growing importance. Sites around Must Farm, for example, show clear evidence for a growing population an increasing prosperity. But their focus is clearly towards the wetland and the emphasis seems to b more on fishing and wildfowling than on agriculture. By about 700-600BC the process abandonment was largely complete. The livestock landscape of the Bronze Age was followed, in th Iron Age, by a landscape dominated by mixed farming of both cereals and livestock. By now th emphasis was shifting both towards the drier hinterland, as the presence of a single large far droveway clearly demonstrates. The settlement pattern altered too: from about 600BC we see th appearance of the first nucleated, village-style settlements that replaced the isolated farmsteads of th Bronze Age.

The transition into Roman times appears to have been smooth and uneventful. Pottery found the shows that the substantial Iron Age farm near the Cat's Water in Fengate continued to be used into th third century ad. Finally, the area has not produced evidence for post-Roman nor Anglo-Saxo settlement, almost certainly because conditions were too wet underfoot. By now, it was an are reserved for seasonal pasture – hence the name Fengate, which means 'road to the fen'.

5. The Platform

Slightly nearer the Northey landfall to the west the posts crossed an artificial island or platfor whose timbers we had revealed along the sides of the dyke, back in ’82, where they extended for distance of over 80m. Sadly, we still don’t understand why the platform was built. But we do know was built, because the wood used was felled and included planks and timber – there was very litt brushwood or driftwood. Moreover it was fashioned from tens (even hundreds) of thousands timbers which included areas of vertical posts – maybe the remnants of other causeways. We do kno that the edges of the platform were very carefully constructed from logs and planks, so there can be doubt at all that the platform itself was a built structure. It was also a large one, measuring 175m (N S) by 155m (E-W), in a sort of squashed oval shape covering 2.71ha (6.69 acres).

The platform was positioned c.200m from the Northey landfall in a very wet and low-lying part the fen. Just to the north our boreholes revealed part of a large lake with expanses of open water a areas of white and of yellow water lilies. With alder trees lining the edges of the lake it must hav been a very beautiful place – rather like the large mere nearby in the Holme Fen Nature Reserve.

The known extent of the platform

So what was its purpose? Originally we believed it was a Fenland equivalent of a Swiss La Village, or of the famous marsh settlements at Glastonbury and Meare in Somerset. But we could fi no evidence at all for houses or for habitation, and besides, the platform would have been far too we So that idea was rejected. I shall have a bit more to say about the platform later, but for now let’s ju conclude that it’s still a mystery. However, I’m certain it’s one that we can crack – and there’s positive side to this, too. So let’s not forget: it will give future generations of archaeologis something really worthwhile and exciting to investigate. I wish them luck!

6. The Finds

Flag Fen has produced a remarkably diverse collection of finds which range from ordina domestic pottery, to four complete and largely unused corn-grinding stones (known as querns) a over 300 examples of Bronze and Iron Age metalwork. In addition the excavations also reveale turned shale bracelets and a surprisingly large collection of animal bones, mostly from joints of mea but also from several Collie-sized dogs.

The largest number of finds came from excavations in 1989, ahead of the modern power station, the Fengate (or eastern) landfall of the post alignment. Most of the metalwork from the power statio was found using detectors, a technique which is largely unbiased. The distribution of metalwork revealed by the detectors is therefore a true reflection of its original spread in antiquity. The va majority of metal finds were among, and to the south side of, the posts. Most of the items recovere were damaged (probably deliberately) and many had been carefully dropped or placed, rather tha thrown, into the water. This suggests that much of the metalwork, had been deliberately removed fro daily life by being ritually destroyed. Its deposition within the waters of Flag Fen was a symbolic wa of marking its passage to another realm – perhaps that of the ancestors or the afterlife.

The majority of metal items were in bronze, an alloy, usually composed of about 10 % tin and 90 copper (brass, introduced to Britain in Roman times, also contains zinc). In all, the power statio excavation revealed just under 300 metal objects, of which the large majority were pins, rings a ornaments. The greatest weight of metal, however, was in weapons: swords, dirks, daggers and rapier. Tools were relatively rare, apart from a collection of almost 20 tanged chisels, punches a awls which were found in the same area and probably represent an individual craftsman's tool kit.

Bronze swords were a characteristic find. The earliest swords date to the middle Bronze Ag around 1300BC, and have long thrusting blades. They were bent and broken and rivets were detache (presumably as the hilt was smashed), before being placed in the water. By the Late Bronze Ag around 1100BC, the style of swords had changed from thrusting rapiers to slashing weapons where th main weight of the leaf-shaped blade was towards the tip. These weapons had more in common with cutlass or scimitar than a rapier. But they were broken, bent and damaged before being dropped in th water, and there is evidence, too, that their scabbards were also mistreated.

A selection of the bronze weaponry

Most of the metalwork can be dated to the Late Bronze Age and belong to a well-defined styl group or 'industry' named after the Fenland village of Wilburton, a few miles north of Cambridg Wilburton itself is on an old 'island', but the wet fen around it has produced large quantities of La Bronze Age metalwork, in a very distinctive style – and nearly all of it, I am quite convinced, was p there on purpose. Two complete Wilburton swords were found at the power station, together wi fragments of others, and broken pieces of scabbard fittings. There was also a complete, but broke Early Iron Age sword (fourth and fifth centuries BC) and fragments from several others.

The collection of smaller blade weapons was extraordinary, ranging from a complete Midd Bronze Age rapier, via a selection of Late Bronze Age dirks and daggers to what can only be describe as a miniature Wilburton sword. Late Bronze Age spears were less plentifully represented, but or

spearhead, although partially sharpened, was still unfinished, as the socket for its shaft was still fill with mould material; others still had pieces of wooden shaft in their sockets. The non-business end many Bronze Age spear shafts were sometimes shod with a ferrule, rather like a walking stick. Thes are generally quite small, but one very unusual large, broken example was also found at the pow station.

It has been suggested that many Late Bronze Age shields and weapons found in bogs, fens ar rivers were not functional. Professor John Coles has convincingly shown that the shafts of larg spearheads were often too small to be used, and the thin bronze of shields would simply buckle and r if struck hard by a Bronze Age sword. The same must apply to sheet bronze helmets, too. Possib fragments from one, and maybe two helmets were found and (if confirmed) these would be the fir examples from Britain. Again, they were smashed, and this makes it difficult to be certain about the identification. The late Dr. David Coombs was more convinced when he first saw them in the fiel but seemed to change his mind in the metalwork chapter of the Flag Fen Basin Report. [8]

The most unusual find was a pair of sprung bronze shears in a carefully carved, fitted wooden bo which had a little slot in the base for a sharpening stone. These shears are of Iron Age date and can b used for shearing or cutting many things, from human hair or wool to thin willow osiers. They we unique in bronze, until the recent (2004) discovery of a decorated example from Hamperden End, Essex. The decoration places the Essex shears to the later Iron Age, around 20BC–AD70. It's hard t be certain, but I would place the Flag Fen shears a century or two earlier, but still in the Iron Age.

The remarkable bronze shears

The power station excavations also revealed an array of broken Bronze Age pins, mostly of stic type and with disc heads, some of which were decorated. Various rings in bronze and tin could hav been ornaments or harness fittings and are entirely characteristic of the Late Bronze Age Wilburto tradition of metalwork. Early Iron Age brooches, pins and ornaments were also bent, twisted otherwise deliberately damaged. This would suggest that the rites surrounding their deposition in th water were the same as in Bronze Age times. They were also very high class objects, often wi provision for inlaid decoration of tin, glass or coral – all of which, sadly, had been smashed out. It perhaps worth noting that some of the Iron Age fine brooches are the type of item one would normall expect to find in a well-furnished, elite warrior grave.

Arguably the most remarkable ornament was again smashed. Being unique it is hard to date at th stage, other than to state that it is probably Bronze Age. It is a large bracelet or armlet (a bracel worn on the upper arm) of shale, but deeply inlaid with lead, which has been applied in strips. Th decoration in neat zigzag bands is very distinctly Bronze Age (by the Iron Age it would have bee more curvy and swirling) and can best be paralleled by a remarkable inlaid shale bowl of probab Late Bronze Age date, from Caergwrle, now in the National Museum of Wales. It is an exceptionall fine object.

Another extraordinary aspect of the power station discoveries was the fact that a surprisingly hig proportion of the metal finds are made from pure metallic tin. This has not been noted before Britain, but is probably due to the site's naturally waterlogged conditions (which impede corrosion and the fact that most tin items are very small and are unlikely to be spotted with the naked eye. Oth tiny finds included individual bronze rivets from swords and daggers. These again indicate a degree

deliberate smashing and their discovery amply justifies the use of metal-detectors.

A crucible fragment that had been used to melt pure tin, was found on the Iron Age Cat's Water dr land settlement of Fengate, just south of the power station, in 1975. This could indicate that some the power station finds were made locally, perhaps for the sole purpose of 'sacrifice' to the water This suggestion might seem ridiculous were it not for the fact that many of the metal objects, such the bronze swords, were clearly rather second-rate castings. We have already referred to the spearhea with mould material still in its socket, but at least two of the swords had been broken across maj casting flaws and one must ask whether they could ever have been used in actual battle. Similarly th miniature Wilburton sword is too tiny to be an efficient fighting weapon. Could it be that much of th material was actually manufactured on site with deposition and ceremonial breakage in mind?

Crucible, shale bracelet, dagger blade, pin, and antler harness cheek-piece, from the post alignment within the platform

It would be a mistake to give the impression that metalwork was the only material found at th power station sub-site. There were many animal bones, often of dogs, and numerous pot sherds, to Whether these were deposited in the water along with the metalwork remains to be seen, however.

Death was a recurrent theme. We have already mentioned a body, found on the north-eastern side the posts, and two thigh bones of a fairly tall person were also found on that side, but some way awa from the articulated bones. At one point an area of posts had been used to dispose of loose huma bones; over three individuals are represented and with the bones we found a broken shale bracelet an a complete boar's tusk; these must surely be offerings of some sort and were probably associated wi rites of passage to do with death.

One of the most remarkable aspects of Flag Fen is that metalwork continued to be deposited in an around the posts for several centuries after the last episode of rebuilding (around 900BC). This wou suggest that even though we know that conditions in the Early Iron Age were growing wetter, the po alignment continues to be used as a causeway, presumably during the drier months of summe Maybe, too, the site could have been visited by boat in the winter. Although most of the metalwor belongs to the Wilburton tradition of the Late Bronze Age, a significant amount of material, includin such large items as swords, continued to be deposited in the subsequent Ewart Park (mid-tenth eighth centuries BC) and Llyn Fawr (seventh century BC) phases of the Late Bronze Age. There ar about twenty true Iron Age metal finds, including no less than two broken iron swords, the decorate bronze scabbard plate, an extraordinarily elaborate bronze plate brooch, numerous dress pins and th well-known shears in their wooden box. This is not a bad haul for a supposedly Bronze Age site!

7. The Religious Ceremonies

Religion and deeply-held beliefs are always difficult subjects to discuss. If you happen to l someone from the West, writing in modern times there are added difficulties. In modern Europe, fo example, we carefully separate many aspects of our lives: religion is confined to Friday, Saturday o Sunday, depending on whether one happens to be Muslim, Jewish or Christian; the worship takes pla in a special purpose-built building known as a Mosque, Synagogue or Church. Work also happens in designated spot: a farm, factory or office. Domestic life happens at home, while education is at scho or university. Even holidays and normal entertainment takes place somewhere appropriate: a pu night club, holiday camp, hotel or tourist beach. But in prehistory the boundaries were far less strict drawn. Yes, there were specialized monuments for burials and ceremonies, places like the great lon barrows of the Neolithic and, of course, the henges of the Early Bronze Age, but by the start of th Middle Bronze Age, around 1500BC (that's just two centuries before the date we currently believ Flag Fen came into existence), these great sites fell into dis-use and were mostly abandoned. Durin the later Bronze Age and Iron Age, religious ceremonies very often took place out in the countrysid often, as at Flag Fen, within or close by bogs, rivers or lakes.

So when I am asked: what was the function of Flag Fen? I take a deep breath, because I know th reply won't be simple. In fact, that's why we chose to refer to the posts as an alignment. It's also wh we didn't use a term like 'causeway. Take another widely accepted archaeological name: 'hillfort'; t most people that word suggests just two things: a fort on a hill. And why not, you might ask. Th trouble is, we now realize that hillforts were far more than mere forts on hills. Some were larg settlements – almost towns – and nearly all of them also played a strong symbolic, if not actual religious, part in the lives of the communities who built and occupied them. The same can be said f Flag Fen.

The post alignment was undoubtedly used as a road and there must be several tons of sand an gravel still in-situ that was spread there in the Late Bronze Age to make the walkway's planks les slippery. But at certain other times the route was also used as a ceremonial centre. These ceremoni involved the deposition of probably thousands of metal, stone, shale, ceramic and other object together with cuts of meat, food and other perishable items. These things were placed in the waters Flag Fen, both within the timbers of the causeway and along its south-western, or 'inland', side.

The post alignment may have marked out the path of a long-lived road and as conditions gre wetter it became a causeway, but they also indicated the boundaries of an important religious area maybe even a shrine. It was also probably an important boundary, because bronze objects were onl found along its south side – and not on the open, fenward, northern side. Maybe that was another cla or tribe's territory? In modern terms, it's as if trains arrived at a cathedral built into the Berlin Wal Everything seems hopelessly muddled-up to our neat, compartmentalized Western way of thinking.

There are also some slight indications that the post alignment in certain areas, such as when crossed through the great platform (and now the railway station metaphor seems regrettable), was su divided into shorter lengths, which may have been controlled or maintained by different families other social sub-groups. This doesn't mean that the route across the fen was blocked – we have n evidence for that – but it may have been marked in some way – maybe with decorated posts or timb portals. Again, this suggests that the alignment was more than just a causeway. At this stage it seem probable that the rituals and ceremonies would have taken place at special occasions, maybe th Bronze Age equivalent of Christian Sundays, when deaths were commemorated by offering a dea man's sword to the waters. Sometimes the finds hint at more diverse ceremonies: a cache of miniatu lead anvils and bronze engraving tools could indicate initiation rites at the conclusion of a meta worker's apprenticeship; a group of quernstones could represent marriage offerings; broken pins brooches hint at other domestic ceremonies. Maybe those Collie dogs were helping their dead maste

find their way down the lanes and byways of the Afterlife?

8. Interpretation: What Does it all Mean?

My immediate reaction to that crucially important question is to throw my hands in the air, turn m back on the person who asked it, and say nothing. But these aren't the Middle Ages and I cann pretend to be a mad hermit. So, let's have another go at that earlier question: what was the po alignment? First and foremost it was undoubtedly a causeway or trackway across the wetland th separated Fengate from Northey 'island'. But it was also a barrier that separated the Flag Fen bas from the open fen to the north and east. Flag Fen was a naturally enclosed basin, which w surrounded by the fields and settlements of Northey, Fengate and Must Farm/Bradley Fen – a recent discovered new Bronze Age settlement complex on the northern side of Whittlesey 'island'. All we within clear sight of the Flag Fen post alignment and platform. The wetland basin would hav 'belonged to' and have been controlled by these people. It was a vitally important resource that had be protected: a source of winter protein, summer grazing, peat, reeds, firewood and salt. Plainly the did not want people from outside to have access to it. This might help to explain the mass of pos used in the northern part of the post alignment (especially Row 4). But the posts also seem to have ha another, less practical, role – which is what I will consider next.

Common sense, if nothing else, suggests that the deposition of so much metalwork, not to mentio complete pots, smashed shale bracelets and unused quernstones, must have been deliberate. And th only explanation for such seemingly impractical, senseless destruction or waste of valuable resourc has to be something to do with religion, ceremonial or ritual. Moreover, these 'offerings' were als taking place on a large scale: Flag Fen must have been more than a purely local shrine. So if it h accepted that Flag Fen and the power station were parts of a religious centre of some sort, we mu next consider what might have been happening there. In other words, what did these religious rit comprise?

The metalwork at the power station is principally composed of weapons and ornaments. Furth east, out in the basin proper at Flag Fen we have so far found one Iron Age brooch, a late Iron Ag sword scabbard plate, a Late Bronze Age sword scabbard chape (or tip), a Late Bronze Age stick pin, Late or Middle Bronze Age dagger, a so-called 'flesh-hook' and two leaf-shaped bronze spearhead We have also found evidence either for the reuse of parts of vehicles, or for their dismantling an deliberate incorporation into the post alignment as offerings. So far we have found part of a tripartit wooden wheel, in the lower levels (and therefore dating to shortly after 1300BC) and two axles, a from different vehicles. Our most recent excavations on the extreme edge of the Northey shore hav revealed rings, like those found at the power station, and a bronze harness-fitting, or slide for a stra which can be closely paralleled in a hoard of Late Bronze Age metal objects found at Parc-y-Meirc Denbighshire.

As at the power station, these finds were amongst the posts or on their south-western side. Th other distinctive items common to the two areas are smashed shale bracelets. At Flag Fen, too, w have evidence for careful deposition of pottery.

It has been suggested that there are fewer metalwork finds at Flag Fen than at the power station, b in fact the former has produced slightly more on average, per square metre, than the latter. As at th power station the Flag Fen metalwork consists of weaponry and ornaments, most of it broken. Th balance of probability now indicates that the whole of the post alignment, including the section acro Flag Fen, which could be 1km (0.75miles) in total length, is likely to be a huge religious monument.

Excavation during the long, hot summer of 1990 produced solid evidence that Flag Fen and th Fengate power station are all part of the same site. First, work with tree-rings demonstrated that a hig proportion of the timbers from each area were growing at the same time. Second, as we excavate down to the lowest timbers at the main Flag Fen excavation we came across a bronze stick-pin unusual continental type; a large socketed spearhead; and, most excitingly, the lower part of a swo

scabbard, known as a chape. Like the power station finds of 1989, these were Late Bronze Ag weapons or ornaments. There was nothing useful or utilitarian in this collection of metal objects. Eac item had been deliberately broken, and the spearhead had been carefully hidden beneath a large, axe log.

Archaeologists have long been aware of the deliberate, 'ritual' deposition of Bronze Age metalwo in wetlands. Of course we cannot be certain that all of the many thousands of Bronze Age metalwo finds from the Fens got there during religious or sacrificial rituals, some might simply represe casual loss, others might have been hidden there for safety, but the sheer quantity of complete deliberately damaged items found in the Fens is too enormous to support the idea that Bronze Ag people were either absurdly forgetful or too lazy to keep track of their valuables. There is also problem in deciding what parts of the Fen were indeed truly wet in the Bronze Age – many areas, fo example, may well have been small dry islands. It is very easy when studying a region such as Fenlan from outside, to treat it as all the same, whereas in reality, as we have seen, the apparently fla featureless modern countryside hides a wealth of complex and highly diverse ancient landscapes.

So, having itemised reasons to be cautious, we are left with a core of unusual, apparent inexplicable, finds that must owe their existence in the Fen to religious or other rituals. The ma group of such ritual finds is surely the weapons, many of which show clear signs of delibera destruction. The huge quantities and high quality of Later Bronze Age metalwork recovered from th Fens and certain rivers of southern Britain (particularly the Thames) has led archaeologists recently draw comparisons with the rich barrow burials of the preceding Neolithic and Early Bronze Age Maybe, it is argued, we are seeing here symbolic, if not actual burial of important people in the wate of rivers and fens. It should also be pointed out that this is not a phenomenon restricted to Brita alone, as Bronze Age metalwork is known from wetland situations over large areas of northern an Atlantic Europe – although nowhere are the quantities as great as in southern Britain.

Although the general nature of the depositional rites in later Bronze and Iron Age Britain is simil and often involves weaponry, causeways and water, no two sites are ever identical. I will discuss th nearby site at Fiskerton shortly, but here all I need to note is that the items found there include larg numbers of practical, workmanlike tools, such as axes, rasps and so forth. These seem to be large absent at Flag Fen and suggest either that rituals changed between the Bronze and Iron Ages or, mo probably, that people living in the two regions had their own ideas about religion – ideas that ha developed over millennia.

The 'funerary' argument has much to recommend it, and at Flag Fen and the power station we ca I believe, argue that death featured prominently. I am sure that the smashed black shale bracelets an armlets might well have had some funerary significance. On the other hand I also think there w more to what went on at Flag Fen than merely the disposal or remembrance of the dead. For a sta thanks to metal detectors we have, for the first time, an idea of the enormous variety of metalwo that was deposited in the waters. This surely must indicate both a range of people and a range activities.

There are magnificent items doubtless worth the modern equivalent of large sums of money an there are humbler items, maybe worth much less. The key to understanding what might have bee going on lies in the broken state of so many objects. Prior to the Middle Bronze Age, grave goods barrows often included weapons and ornaments, but they are rarely, if ever, deliberately smashed. Th is something new. It may well have an underlying economic purpose. Professor Richard Bradley, fo example, has suggested that some metal was being withdrawn from circulation to keep prices high, b this was probably not in the forefront of people's minds at the time. Furthermore, the destruction something valuable in the naturally open surroundings of water is essentially a public act, and on which could be interpreted as a display of wealth and prestige.

Maybe similar ideas are applicable to Flag Fen. Perhaps the public destruction of valuable item such as the swords, was indeed a display of wealth, power and prestige, but the vast majority offerings were very much smaller in scale and were probably about more private rites, such as th commemoration of an ordinary family member who had recently died, been married, had given birt or had reached adulthood. These are some of the usual rites of passage, many of which could hav been celebrated at Flag Fen.

I have suggested that many of the rites celebrated along the post alignment would have been sma scale, perhaps family affairs, and I drew attention to the symbols of family life represented by, amon other things, the four unused or only lightly used quernstones. It just so happened that these we found directly below one of the transverse 'partitions' that might possibly have subdivided the po alignment into a series of 5-6m long segments when it was first constructed. If these segments d indeed exist, they continued to be respected well into the Iron Age, because a finely decorated swor scabbard plate was found on a partition line, long after the final replacement of the last timber Maybe all of this is coincidence, but I wonder whether the occurrence of 'offerings' on the boundari between different segments may not be a similar process to the deposition of significant items, such a complete pots or human skulls at the butt-ends, or terminals, of the segmented ditches of very muc earlier (3000BC) Neolithic sites, known as causewayed enclosures?

My team excavated a nearby causewayed enclosure at Etton, in the Welland Valley, about ten mile north of Flag Fen, in the mid-1980s. We recovered a wealth of evidence there for ritual and ceremon and much of it seems to anticipate what we were later to find at Flag Fen. [9] Now I'm not suggestin continuity with a site like Etton, which after all is about two millennia earlier than Flag Fen, but rath the re-emergence or 'convergent evolution' of a set of broadly similar ideas. At Etton I have suggeste that each ditch segment may have represented, symbolised or 'stood for' a family or lineage grou The item in the butt-end, at the causeway separating the ditch segment from that alongside it, wou have expressed the identity of the kin group that practised their rituals there. Maybe the human skul placed at the ditch ends, facing out towards the causeways, were indeed the heads of importa ancestors? Maybe at Flag Fen the elaborately decorated scabbard plate belonged to a significa warrior who had left his mark on the family? We can only speculate, but if I am correct, it doe suggest that ritual and ceremony were built into the post alignment from its very inception.

Since we discovered the site in 1982 a number of other 'Flag Fens' have been found in Britai including examples from near Eastbourne on the south coast, at Caldicote in South Wales, one in th Trent valley and, closest of all, a number in the Witham valley, just east of Lincoln. It now seem probable that there are several post-built timber causeways in the Witham valley, including at lea one of the Late Bronze Age, near the village of Washingborough; but the Witham valley site whic most closely resembles Flag Fen is actually Iron Age in date and is located near the village Fiskerton. It was first investigated by Naomi Field in the 1980s and has recently bee comprehensively written up by Naomi and Mike Parker Pearson. [10]

Fiskerton, like Flag Fen, was indeed a causeway and like Flag Fen it ran from a mainland across an 'island'. Along its course were deposited all sorts of valuable items, including the hilt of what possibly the most lavishly decorated sword known from Iron Age Britain. There is also good evidenc to suggest that the causeway was repaired in years when the moon went into total eclipse. Unlike Fla Fen (which does not seem to have favoured lunar eclipse years), the 'offerings' at Fiskerton were n smashed and included many tools and implements, as well as weapons and ornaments. So the two sit are by no means carbon copies. Having said that, they both possess important common themes, to d with water, journeys and the Afterlife. What I am saying is that we are not looking here at a emerging religion or 'water cult', but rather at a series of commonly held concepts to do with identi and cosmology (or view of the world). These people were doubtless in close communication with on

another, and with other communities much further away. They plainly had much in common, but the still expressed their beliefs in ways which fitted with their own identities. Orthodoxy, be it Druidic whatever, had yet to make its presence felt in the Fens.

I distrust simple explanations in a subject as complex and challenging as archaeology. Whenever hear it said that some event was 'caused' by a volcanic eruption, increased rainfall, sea-level rise, whatever, I find myself asking the simple question: yes, fine, but those people must have been awa that the nearby volcano could blow its top, or that rain could be severe, or that storms could cau huge waves. Put another way, ancient people weren't stupid. And unlike many of us today, they a experienced the world around them at first hand. They didn't have the excuse of living at times virtual realities. So why did they put themselves in a position where such disasters could strike? Th answer has to be that they were prepared to take the risk. They could accept potential problem because they knew that living in certain areas was worth it, because of what the area had to offer: lik for example, highly fertile volcanic soils. In the Fens, the richest pickings are to be made nearest th waters' edge. That's where the grass grows greenest and crops seem to leap out of the soil. It's als where you can net fish, trap wildfowl or extract salt from dilute seawater. We know that in the Bronz Age protein was hard to come by in winter – so inexhaustible supplies of eels, fish and wildfo (especially in the lean months of winter) would have been most welcome - and of course salt could b used to preserve that meat for the future – or for trade inland. So the margins, islands and drier par of the Fens would have been very attractive place in which to settle. Very few people – perhaps a fe herdsmen, fishermen and hunters – would actually have lived for any length of time out in the wette peat lands. Their families would have stayed on safer, drier ground.

As we have already seen, one major mystery remains to be solved: why was the platform built an what took place there? All we can say at this stage is that the platform did undoubtedly exist. W found a continuous spread of timber along the dykeside in our original investigations in 1982 and '8 Then we proved its extent both with the borehole surveys on either side of the Mustdyke and with th construction of the Mere in 1987. More recently one or two trial trenches have confirmed i existence, but none of these have penetrated below the uppermost timbers. Dendrochronology sugges that the platform and the post alignment are both precisely contemporary and were constructe together, as part of the same vast structure, but what was it built to achieve?

Let's take an obvious idea first: could it simply have served a practical purpose to consolidate particularly wet area? Perhaps, but why make it so large and go to the trouble of providing a perimet 'boardwalk'? My current 'best bet' is that the platform may possibly represent a miniature symbol dry land within a wetland – in effect, a 'tamed' area intended for, set aside and used exclusively fo ritual purposes. If that seems a huge amount of effort to achieve something that was functional useless, I can only point to Silbury Hill, Stonehenge or indeed Buckingham Palace or Westminste Abbey.

Another thought has struck me: could the platform at Flag Fen be an equivalent to that immens but enigmatic Iron Age road at Corlea, in southern Ireland? The Corlea road was a prehistoric whi elephant. It was built of massive oak planks which almost immediately began to sink into th surrounding bog. [11] Some have suggested that this was an example of incompetence, but I don share that view. Surely those Iron Age Irish wetlanders understood only too well how to construct sound roadway. No, I believe they built the Corlea road in the certain knowledge that it would short vanish below those dark peaty waters. Put another way, the road itself had taken a journey – perhaps the realms of the ancestors. Who knows, but maybe the Flag Fen platform was seen as somethin similar, something impermanent, transitory and probably rather mysterious and magical? We mustn shy away from such things – archaeologists, especially academic archaeologists, tend sometimes over-analyse. It's as if they were scared of using their imaginations. And if ever a great site demande

imagination is was surely Flag Fen: we know so much, yet at the same time, so little, about it.

Before I leave this section on the meaning of Flag Fen, I must point out that research is sti continuing, both at Flag Fen itself, and in the immediate area, known as the Flag Fen basin. The rece discovery of eight dug-out Bronze Age boats at nearby Must Farm (which would normally be clear visible were it not for the railway embankment and the flood bank of the River Nene) has caused national sensation. [12] The Cambridge University Archaeological Unit has done some amazing wo in the area, including a splendid summary and reassessment of my original site and excavations Fengate. This important updating also includes a large number of new excavations. [13] I think it probably fair to say that in their quiet way, the archaeologists now actively working in the Flag Fe basin are revolutionising our understanding of British later prehistory.

9. Flag Fen: Wood, Wheels and Status

Flag Fen is known internationally because of its wood and timber. Generally speaking this falls in two quite distinct categories: lightweight coppice products, such as wattlework, hurdles and eve basketry (I'm thinking here of the fish traps from Must Farm); and heavy-duty items, such as pos and planks, which I'll discuss in the next section. But there is another, and far rarer group of find which one might label fine carpentry and crafts. This group includes axe hafts, bowls, buckets an perhaps most intricate of all: wheels. Indeed, I'm in little doubt that as early as the later Bronze Ag wheels were fashioned by specialist wheelwrights, who possessed detailed knowledge of the differe native British trees and their properties.

At Flag Fen the story of this very specialised branch of carpentry begins back in Fengate in 197 when at the very end of the final season an Iron Age well was discovered. We didn't know it then, bu this well was positioned about 100m from the easterly landfall of the post alignment. We'd discovere prehistoric wells and watering-holes previously, but this one was different because its wattle lining (woven hazel and willow rods) was held in position by a number of small stakes, which included split-down piece from a larger wooden object. I suspect it had been split-down in a hurry, using an old wood which happened to have been lying around in the yard. But what made this re-used stak remarkable was a dovetail housing joint, or socket, half-way along its length. It was this piece wood, and its then unique dovetail joint, which persuaded the now well-known wood specialist Mais Taylor to continue with the woodworking studies, she had begun as an undergraduate, a few yea earlier. At the time, she didn't know what it had come from, but she did know the dovetail had bee very carefully cut. We must now roll the story forward some twenty years to the discovery of part of wooden tripartite (three-part) wheel at Flag Fen. [14] This wheel was made from three split planks alder wood which were held together by laths of oak sapwood. The laths were housed in carefully c dovetail slots, identical in size and profile to the one in the fragment of wood we'd found in the well Fengate almost twenty years previously. I can't resist it: the wheel had turned full circle.

One third of the tripartite wheel

But this story has a final twist. In 1997 I was directing excavations at a site known as Welland Ban Quarry just north of Peterborough, near Market Deeping (in southern Lincolnshire). It had been a h dry season, but there had been a sudden thundery shower while we had been eating our midday meal the site hut. After lunch we were walking back to the trenches as the ground was drying out and I wa immediately alerted: these were ideal conditions for spotting very ephemeral traces in the groun And I was right (or lucky, or both), because there, in a patch of silty ground we could clearly see dar lines. They were vanishing in the hot sunshine, even as we watched. I fitted a fine rose to a waterin can, and sprinkled the ground. Then we all watched, as the marks slowly reappeared. But this time w were ready, and as soon as they were visible, we scratched around out their edges with our trowels.

The plans we then drew showed that a wheeled vehicle had made two passes through the silt patc and in one spot it had reversed. [15] We could trace them for just under 20m so were able to get reasonable impression. As the course followed had been curved in one place we could clearly see th the vehicle had just two wheels. They were 1.10m apart and both were almost exactly as thick as th very slightly earlier wheel from Flag Fen. So this was a relatively light vehicle, and not the sort heavy farm cart we had expected. I'm in little doubt that it was the late Bronze Age (in this instanc

600-800BC) equivalent of a Victorian gig – in other words it was a light, single-person transport. have resisted the temptation to call it a chariot, as the tabloid press would go mad, and besides, v have absolutely no evidence to think it was a military vehicle of any sort. No, the most sensib suggestion is that it would have belonged to somebody of importance. Perhaps it's worth recalling th the first cars were bought and used by the richer members of Victorian and Edwardian society; the were status symbols. The Model T Ford, which famously brought 'motoring to the masses', did n appear until sometime later.

I don't believe that the discovery of the wheel, with an axle nearby, was a casual find. I a convinced it was placed in the ground deliberately, perhaps during the same rites that saw th deposition of other possessions of wealthy people, such as the swords, daggers and rapiers. In oth words, it was a symbol of power and prestige – the Bronze Age equivalent if not of a Rolls Royc then a Mercedes Benz, or a Range Rover.

10. Flag Fen and the Sophistication of Ancient Technology

As a practical person I have always been fascinated by ancient technology, often known today academic circles as 'primtec', which is short for 'primitive technology'. That term makes me ver annoyed, because it sums up certain attitudes to past practices which are, to say the very leas patronising. I would imagine most academics, if sent back to the Old Stone Age, say fifty thousan years ago, would find it very challenging to produce the simplest of flint tools, yet that is wh ordinary people did, and routinely. Today there are just 3 or 4 skilled flint-workers in Britain wh possess the skills needed to produce such items – so to label these skills as 'primitive' is plain absurd. So my annoyance aside, why is Flag Fen such a good place to study early technology?

The answer to that question is quite simple: it's all about preservation. Waterlogging not onl preserves wood, it can be very kind to other materials, too. If flint tools fall into soft muds they ten to be very well conserved: for example, the microscopic damage done to their cutting edges ofte remains intact and this allows certain specialists to examine what has become known as 'edge wea very closely. When we were excavating the Fengate sites back in the 1970s we published one of th first edge wear reports in British archaeology. [16] This revealed that flint tools were used for a hug variety of tasks ranging from scraping bone, to de-fleshing leather and cutting softer materials. Th cutting tools tended to be longer and thinner than those used for scraping which were generally short and more squat, and often showed the edge-reworking that is so characteristic of scrapers.

While flint tools, pottery and metalwork are all well-preserved, perhaps the most important of o experimental research has been with wood. As a general rule, wood survives very rarely o archaeological sites, but it must always have been the most important building material of all, an especially in the days before sophisticated masonry. Indeed, with the rare exception of wha jawbones in places like Iceland, it's almost impossible to conceive of a roofing support that does n involve wooden rafters.

The first challenge to any modern person faced with the task of replicating Bronze Age carpentry simple: saws didn't yet exist in Britain. The earliest saws known here come from the famous Iron Ag 'lake village' settlement at Glastonbury and were, in effect, pruning saws: they were small and the teeth were angled back, towards the haft, so they cut on the pull, rather than the push. Clearly axe couldn't be used for producing something as long as a plank, so the only other available technique splitting. Now most people have probably had a go at splitting logs for the fire. On the whole it's qui easy and that's largely because the logs are quite short, dry and brittle; but even so, knots can caus big problems and the wood generally splits where it has developed drying-out cracks, which may n be where you want. To do accurate splitting you must work with 'green', freshly felled wood, and n with dry, or seasoned, wood, which is very much harder. Indeed, seasoned oak heartwood is so hard can barely be cut by even the sharpest of bronze axes.

Much of the initial splitting was probably done out in the woods and forests where the trees we growing. And here I must confess that before I began actually doing ancient woodworking, I didn realise how important it was to select the right trees. They must be straight, and without the sort twists to the trunk that develop on exposed and windy sites. Having spent time with an experience forester I have learned how to spot the tell-tale traces of hidden heartwood rot and how to see whe old branches have been trimmed off and the bark grown over. All of these things can make subsequen splitting very much harder. Bronze Age carpenters must surely have known how to spot these tell-ta signs– and probably many others besides.

Once the timber has been felled, the next step is to cut off the branches of the crown, to leave ju the trunk. We'll see in a moment that there are two types of splits, but you have first to divide th trunk cleanly in half to achieve either of them. When I was first shown how to do it by the renowne experimental woodworker Richard Darrah, I couldn't believe my eyes. I'd arrived in the wood wi