

### Westwood Prehistory Walk Local History Group 1 July 2023

Standing at the Black Mill, taking in the 360-degree view, you can feel on top of the world, and so our distant ancestors must have felt when they buried their dead nearby. Indeed, the Black Mill itself may lie on a Bronze Age round barrow, as two lie in line a hundred metres to the northeast, with a further one lying across Newbald Road near the Racecourse.

It's thanks to a medieval grant of Westwood grazing rights to the people of Beverley, that these monuments are so well-preserved. And it's thanks to modern aerial photography and inventions such as geophysical surveying, that we can understand their detailed topography.

They take some finding on the ground. Now only about half a metre above ground level they're best seen in winter, especially under snow, or in low evening light when the faint ditches around them are discernible. We stood atop one of them wondering what grave goods might lie beneath, and how magnificent they must have looked when first built, over three thousand years ago. Much higher than now, they may have been covered with chalk, gleaming in the sunlight and visible for miles around. DNA studies have recently shown us that these Bronze Age people, whose ancestors came from the steppes, largely replaced the existing Neolithic people of Britain after their arrival around four and a half thousand years ago.

Below: the group on one of the Bronze Age barrows, looking east.



We walked on to see some of the 'hollow ways' still visible in the landscape, although eaten into in places by bushes, the golf course and the Tan Gallop. We looked at their alignment and cross section and discussed some of the archaeologists' opinions of their origins: some are probably medieval, though some are likely to be much earlier, perhaps prehistoric. One that curves oddly could have been along the boundaries of ancient field systems; another seems clearly to lead from

Burton Bushes across the Westwood towards the site of the Minster. Many lead towards ponds, mostly now dry for a large part of the year now that the water table is much lower than in the past. There is even a short stretch near Westwood Road which may have been part of a Roman road. So much beyond the Westwood boundaries has vanished to ploughing or building that we can only guess.

We moved on to stand in the Iron Age Cemetery next to the old quarry, now woodland known revealingly as the Limekiln Pits or the Archbishop's Pits, across which golfers tee off. These mainly square smaller barrows are easier to spot than the Bronze Age round barrows but still can be confused with nearby features of the golf course and uprooted tree holes. They lie just a couple of hundred metres from the Bronze Age barrows, but a thousand years or more apart in time. However, we know that there are at least thirteen Iron Age barrows in this cemetery and nearby, and they are some of the best preserved in the Riding. Between two and four were excavated in 1875 by Canon William Greenwell. His enthusiasm exceeded his expertise, so there are few records, but we do know that he found a cart burial and iron horse bits, the remnants of which are in the vaults of the British Museum. No bones were found, as they will have been destroyed in the acidic soil.

Dismantled cart burials are almost exclusive to the Yorkshire Wolds, and there are less than thirty known to date. Some of the most spectacular have intriguing and beautifully fashioned grave goods, such as shields, swords and mirrors and one recently found in Pocklington had two horse skeletons buried with it. Some of the cart burials in the Wolds had spears deliberately piercing the bodies. These spears would have probably been visible above the surface, as the square barrows are shallow graves. At least two cart burials were of women.

Archaeologists surmise that the Iron Age people of the East Riding were ancestrally or culturally connected to the Parisii tribes of northern France, who had similar but not identical burial practices and artefacts. We also believe that these tribes traded with the Romans from their arrival in Britain in 55AD until they crossed the Humber to take over in AD71. The tribes must have been quite wealthy, with evidence of thriving agriculture, and an extensive iron industry around Holme on Spalding Moor. There is little evidence of a violent takeover here, apart from strange finds like the South Cave Weapons hoard. Perhaps they collaborated with the invaders against the Brigantes tribes in the west. Much is conjecture.

Finally, we walked to a viewpoint overlooking the Newbald valley. This is full of intriguing earthworks, many of which are attributed to Romano-British inhabitants of the region. We know that Iron Age people were great cattle drovers, and extensive earthworks here suggest a funnel-shaped enclosure, which was probably used for herding cattle. This may be a site where cattle were sold, culled before winter, perhaps castrated, perhaps even feasted upon. It may have been a key site where water was available (there are two remaining ponds in the valley still full today in a wet winter), and where cattle could have been driven up to higher ground to escape winter flooding, and to lower ground for rich summer grazing.

One of the group asked a key question: where did the people live? The answer is we don't know for sure but there are many clues, from archaeological finds dug up during building works: estates, roads, pipelines for example. Why would they not, like us, live on the spring line under modern Beverley, where they would be safer from flooding but have access to water, or on gravel mounds to the south and north of the town, where much evidence has been found of post holes and pits? Finds for example from the new Old College estate, and the Keldgate Manor developments indicate there may have been some settlement there.

We depend on fragments of evidence from these people of the past who spoke to us not with words but with artefacts, mounds and bones. So much is still to be discovered.

Below: the group stands overlooking the Newbald Valley at the western edge of Beverley Westwood.



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Some useful references about the prehistoric sites on Beverley Westwood

<https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1013991>

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<https://historicengland.org.uk/research/results/reports/93-2004>