

## Impact case study (REF3)

<b>Institution:</b> University of Chester		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> Archaeology		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Experiencing the Stone Age: transforming engagement with the Mesolithic archaeology of Lunt Meadows Nature Reserve		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b>		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b> Amy Gray Jones Barry Taylor	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b> Dr, Senior Lecturer Dr, Senior Lecturer	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b> 2011 – ongoing 2013 – ongoing
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2018 – ongoing		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		

**1. Summary of the impact** (indicative maximum 100 words)

Research undertaken by Gray Jones (AGJ) and Taylor (BT) has been used to transform the ways in which the Lancashire Wildlife Trust (LWT) engages audiences with the Mesolithic archaeology on their newest nature reserve, Lunt Meadows, Merseyside. The impact of this work is demonstrated by:

1. A change in practice within the LWT, through the adoption of a new public engagement strategy for the archaeology at Lunt Meadows;
2. Capacity building within the organisation, through the training of LWT staff and volunteers to deliver this strategy;
3. A change in practice within local primary schools, through the adoption of a strategy and resources for teaching about the Stone Age, developed in partnership with the LWT;
4. An increased awareness, knowledge and understanding of the British Mesolithic among LWT staff and volunteers, primary school teachers, and visitors to the reserve;
5. Increased feelings of mindfulness and wellbeing among LWT staff, volunteers, and event participants.

**2. Underpinning research** (indicative maximum 500 words)

The distinctive combination of AGJ and BT's expertise has shed new light on daily life, ritual practice, and belief during the Mesolithic of Britain and north-west Europe. Though some of their work is focused on particular sites and landscapes, it addresses issues that are directly relevant to the British and north-west European Mesolithic more generally, and to Lunt Meadows specifically. Thus, together, their research provided a unique opportunity for the LWT to engage audiences with the Mesolithic archaeology of Lunt Meadows Nature Reserve. This can be summarised under the following themes, which directly underpinned the impact pathways:

*Daily life*

BT's internationally recognised and award-winning research has developed new understandings of the quotidian aspects of Mesolithic life. His collaborative work at Star Carr (R1) has provided a wealth of new evidence for the nature and scale of Mesolithic settlements, forms of architecture, the use of space within and around built structures, and aspects of people's technology and subsistence. This, combined with his distinctive research on other Mesolithic sites in the Vale of Pickering (R2), has also demonstrated the complexity of subsistence practice, highlighting the different forms of skill, knowledge, and technical practice that were employed in the hunting and gathering of a wide range of animal and plant species.

*Relationships with the environment*

BT's research has also provided new perspectives on human-environment relationships. His palaeoenvironmental research has demonstrated the richness and diversity of the Mesolithic environment (R3), and the complex ways in which people engaged with it through economic activities (R2). It also showed how the patterning of activity within landscapes was not only related to the availability of environmental resources, but also to the importance attributed to specific locations within the landscape by Mesolithic people (R2&3). His work also transformed current

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academic understandings of the role that craft and subsistence practices played in developing Mesolithic perceptions of the environment, and thus Mesolithic concepts of personhood and communal identity (R2).

*Society, beliefs and worldviews*

AGJ's research (R4&5) has radically changed academic understandings of mortuary practice and afterlife beliefs in the Mesolithic of Britain and north-west Europe. Notably, the deliberate manipulation of the body after death reveals the agency and effect of the dead on the living, and their role in the construction of personhood and identity in the Mesolithic (R5). This is complemented by BT's research into cultural attitudes towards plants and animals during the Mesolithic (R6). By reviewing new evidence for the ritual treatment of plant and animal materials, he demonstrated the ways in which aspects of the natural world were bound up in Mesolithic ontologies.

Together, AGJ and BT's research directly underpins the resources and engagement activities which have improved the visitor experience at Lunt Meadows; by increasing knowledge and understanding of daily life during the British and north-west European Mesolithic, showing how past humans interacted with plant and animal life, and explaining how they understood their world and their place within it.

**3. References to the research** (indicative maximum of six references)

R1: Milner, N., Conneller, C. and Taylor, B. (eds.) (2018). *Star Carr, Volume 1. A persistent place in a changing world* & *Star Carr, Volume 2. Studies in technology, subsistence and environment*. York: White Rose University Press. <https://doi.org/10.22599>

R2: Taylor, B. (2018). Subsistence, environment and Mesolithic landscape archaeology. *Cambridge Archaeological Journal*, 28: 493-510. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0959774318000021>.

R3: Taylor, B. (2019). Early Holocene wetland succession in the palaeo-Lake Flixton. *Vegetation History and Archaeobotany* 28: 559-573. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00334-019-00714-9>

R4: Gray Jones, A. (2017). Cremation and the use of fire in Mesolithic mortuary practice. In Cerezo-Roman, J. I., Wessman, A. and Williams, H. (eds.). *Cremation and the Archaeology of Death*, pp. 27-51. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

R5: Cobb, H. and Gray Jones, A. (2018). Being Mesolithic in life and death. *Journal of World Prehistory*, 31(3), 367-383. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10963-018-9123-1>.

R6: Taylor, B. (2020) Plants as persons: perceptions of the natural world in the North European Mesolithic. *Time and Mind*, 13:3, 307-330, DOI: 10.1080/1751696X.2020.1815292

**4. Details of the impact** (indicative maximum 750 words)

Lunt Meadows (Sefton, Merseyside) was established as a nature reserve under the management of the Lancashire Wildlife Trust in 2015. An early Mesolithic settlement was identified during the development of the reserve in 2012, and subsequently excavated by the Museum of Liverpool. As this is the only Mesolithic site on a LWT reserve, the Trust were keen to incorporate it into their plans for public engagement. In Autumn 2017 the LWT invited AGJ and BT, as acknowledged experts in the Mesolithic, to contribute as partners in the development stage of a National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) project to enhance public engagement with the archaeological and natural heritage of the Reserve (*Presenting Mesolithic and Modern Life, showcasing the past, present and future*). Prior to the project, resources employed at Lunt Meadows were confined to the management of the site, with limited learning activity, interpretation or signage for archaeology. In 2020 the Trust, in partnership with AGJ and BT, submitted a successful application for Stage 2 of the project to the NLHF, resulting in a grant of £1.1 million (awarded 9 March 2020, staff subsequently furloughed to 1 December 2020). The impact of AGJ and BT's involvement can be summarised as follows:

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### 1: Effecting a change in practice within the LWT

AGJ and BT have developed an innovative public engagement strategy to enhance knowledge of the Mesolithic of Lunt Meadows, and Britain more generally, amongst visitors to the reserve. The strategy was developed in response to participant feedback on a series of eight 'Stone Age Experience' workshops delivered to different audiences (socially excluded young adults, children in education, adults outside of education, and professional educators) held at Lunt Meadows throughout 2018-19. The content of the workshops, and the subsequent engagement strategy, drew on AGJ's research on Mesolithic mortuary practices and social identity (R4&5), and BT's research on Mesolithic settlements, subsistence, and craft technology (R1&2), relationships with the environment (R2&3), and ritual practice and belief (R6).

The effectiveness of the strategy was demonstrated by participant feedback, where 94% of the 79 attendees who completed the post-workshop surveys said that their knowledge and understanding of the Mesolithic had increased, and 98% were encouraged to learn more about the subject. Qualitative feedback was overwhelmingly positive:

*"I aim to learn more about the period and will sign up for further workshops"*

*"Would love to continue learning the hands-on skills Mesolithic people needed"*

*"Definitely will encourage me to learn more and share that knowledge. Would love to volunteer for future projects"*

*"Would like to see more of these workshops"*

*"Excellent workshop, lots of practical work, well taught and organised" (S1)*

Based on these positive evaluations, the strategy was adopted by the LWT as a central part of their new, five-year Learning and Engagement plan for Lunt Meadows (S1).

*"The experiential workshops proved to us just how adaptable learning about the Stone Age can be, and the feedback was wonderful. The outcomes of the workshops shaped the activity plan and gave us the data we needed to develop a plan for the delivery stage of the project, which went directly into the bid to National Lottery Heritage Fund". Cheryl Ashton, Project Manager (S2)*

*"Our partnership with the University [of Chester] has been a huge success. All the work you did led directly to the Learning and Engagement plan, and our plans for public engagement at Lunt over the next five years. Thank you." Fiona Whitfield, Head of Land Management, LWT (S3)*

### 2: Building capacity in the LWT for increasing public understanding of the Mesolithic

AGJ and BT developed and delivered a successful training programme for LWT staff and volunteers, enabling them to lead, or assist with, the delivery of the public engagement strategy. This contributed to the professional development of LWT staff (a Project Manager, two Community Engagement Officers, and a Learning Officer) and four volunteers involved in work at Lunt Meadows, ensuring the long-term sustainability of the strategy. Staff and volunteers have stated how the training has provided them with new skills, knowledge and confidence, enabling them to play an active role in enhancing engagement with the Mesolithic archaeology of the reserve;

*"Because of what I learnt and experienced with guidance from the University of Chester I felt able to confidently share this early knowledge and practical skills with other attendees and in turn encourage their interest further. I volunteered to assist with workshops, which was a new experience for me, and with...my newly found knowledge I was able to confidently help the attendees with both the practical tasks and their learning experiences". Peter Miles, LWT Volunteer (S5) (a new volunteer and complete novice who has subsequently joined the local Archaeological Society, completed online archaeology training courses, and volunteered with Museum of Liverpool on archaeological surveys and excavation).*

LWT staff who received training have also used their new skills to run successful Mesolithic educational activities at another LWT reserve (Heysham Nature Reserve, Family Event, April 2019), further demonstrating the impact AGJ and BT have had on the Trust's capacity for increasing public awareness of the Mesolithic. Again, the response was overwhelmingly positive,

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with 100% of those who gave feedback describing the activities as ‘excellent’ (S1), while LWT staff have commented positively on how their training has allowed them to increase people’s understanding of the Mesolithic.

*“I feel more confident to talk to the public and my peers about Mesolithic life and what has been found at Lunt Meadows. I could give anyone listening, a picture of what the Lunt landscape may have looked like, how tools were created and how shelter was built...[the training] developed my knowledge substantially. I thought I knew a bit about the Stone Age but I didn’t!”* Cheryl Ashton, Project Manager (S2)

AGJ and BT’s involvement also built capacity within the LWT, through their involvement in the Trust’s successful application for a Stage 2 NHLF grant for £1.1 million. As well as developing the public engagement strategy and training programme, AGJ and BT provided input into the design of the overall bid, the scale and scope of the archaeological aspects of the project, and the writing of the grant application. As a result of the success of the grant application, funding is now available for the construction of a new visitor centre and teaching space at Lunt Meadows, as well as interpretation signage, new paths and facilities, greatly increasing the capacity of the LWT to promote further public engagement with the Mesolithic.

*“You had a huge impact on us... The development project was much broader and more informed as a result of your involvement. The ‘team’ workshops we completed as the development project was coming closer to the bid deadline were very helpful”* Cheryl Ashton, Project Manager (S2)

### **3: Effecting change in Sefton primary schools through the adoption and utilisation of a strategy and resources for teaching the Stone Age at Key Stage 2.**

As part of their work with the LWT, AGJ and BT developed a Unit of Work, aligned with the English National Curriculum for History (Key Stage 2), which uses the Mesolithic to teach the Stone Age in primary schools in the Sefton area. The content of the Unit of Work was based on BT’s research at Star Carr and the surrounding area (R1&2), and his work on Mesolithic beliefs (R6), and AGJ’s research on mortuary practices and social identity (R4&5). The content and scope of the resource was informed by a consultation workshop held in November 2018 attended by teachers from 11 local primary schools. Draft versions were circulated amongst participating schools, who provided feedback which was incorporated into the final version. Feedback on the co-produced resource was overwhelmingly positive:

*“The information looks great, very informative and will be useful for teachers to develop their own understanding before teaching.”*

*“First impressions...thank you! Lots of interesting activities suggested at both school and the [Lunt Meadows] site”*

*“This was very useful and gave lots of ideas and resources that could be used in class”.*

*“Great, wonderful demonstrations and guidance of how to bring the Stone Age to life”*

*“Excellent way to enhance delivery of Stone Age topic”* (S4)

### **4: Increasing knowledge, understanding and awareness of the British Mesolithic among LWT staff and volunteers, primary school teachers, and visitors to the reserve.**

As a direct result of their work, AGJ and BT have increased knowledge, understanding and awareness of the Mesolithic amongst different groups of visitors to the reserve, and members of the project. As noted above, 79 people attended the ‘Stone Age Experience’ workshops, with 94% stating that their knowledge of the Mesolithic had increased. The majority of participants (98%) were encouraged to learn more about the subject (82% were encouraged a lot, and 16% encouraged a little) (S1). This impact is supported by the qualitative feedback collected during the workshops:

*“By demonstrating through a simple craft learning activity I’ve learnt a considerable amount about the Middle Stone Age”*

*“Making cordage as a communal event in a tent felt a real experience of an aspect of Mesolithic life - talking, telling stories while the hands got into a rhythm and made cord”.*

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*"It's made me very interested to learn more so I've ordered a couple of books on the period"*

*"I never cease to be amazed at the ingenuity, tenacity, and technical skill of our ancestors"*

*"They [Mesolithic people] were more intelligent than their stereotype image"*

*"AGJ and BT are so enthusiastic, which is infectious - they have encouraged me to pursue my own armchair research"*

*"It was better than Ray Mears' workshops" (S1)*

All LWT staff and volunteers who received training, and primary school teachers involved in the development of the Unit of Work, also stated that their knowledge of the period had increased. Again, this is supported by qualitative data, such as:

*"I knew nothing about the Stone Age at the start of the project, I have learnt some connections between how Mesolithic people lived then, and the ways we live now" Fiona Whitfield, LWT (S3)*

*"Useful information relevant to the topic and age we teach" (S4)*

### **5. Increased feelings of mindfulness and wellbeing among LWT staff, volunteers, and workshop participants.**

In addition, AGJ and BT found that participants in the 'Stone Age Experience' workshops experienced an increased sense of wellbeing and community as a result of taking part. This was an unexpected impact, and therefore not measured in participant evaluation, but qualitative feedback from the events clearly demonstrate that this was experienced:

*"[I've learnt] how useful for relaxation a practical task is"*

*"..[a] sense of community and of experience being passed on"*

*"It's very pleasant being industrious in a circle of people who are curious and interested" (S1)*

*"Volunteers mentioned how relaxing and captivating your events were...the effect of taking part in a mindfulness activity" Cheryl Ashton, Project Manager (S2)*

One workshop was held solely for a group of young adults suffering from anxiety (from 'MyPlace', an organisation working in partnership with LWT and Lancashire Care NHS Trust to improve mental health and wellbeing amongst young adults). Feedback from the group was again overwhelmingly positive with the group leader commenting that *"talking over an activity was highly effective"* (S1) and a group member said *"...undertaking the activity cleared the mind for listening to detail"* (S1).

### **5. Sources to corroborate the impact** (indicative maximum of 10 references)

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S1: Lunt Meadows Learning and Engagement Plan & Appendices (produced by LWT).

S2: Testimonial from the LWT Project Manager for *Presenting Mesolithic and Modern Life, showcasing the past, present and future*.

S3: Testimonial from the Head of Land Management, LWT.

S4: Feedback collected from primary school teachers participating in resource development.

S5: Testimonial from an LWT Volunteer.