

Community engagement and diverse skillsets

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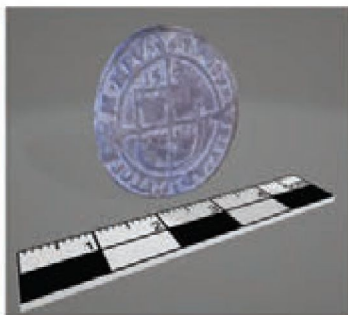
Across the Midlands, HS2 is drawing on broad range of skills and experience as community engagement becomes ever more integral to archaeological work. The variety of expertise archaeology can offer is being put to good use at key archaeological sites in Birmingham, Warwickshire and Staffordshire. Archaeological consultants, engineers, professionals from the museums sector, historians, visualisation specialists and re-enactors are supporting archaeologists in bringing stories of the heritage HS2 is unearthing to families, schools, universities, societies and laypeople.

Opportunities online

The dynamic situation due to COVID-19 this year pushed for a rapid re-focus of engagement towards online activities such as webinars, digital exhibitions and workshops. Without doubt, the situation has presented challenges, but there are clear opportunities for the heritage sector too. Central to adapting to change is use of a range of expertise. One of the positives for engagement is that greater weight is being placed directly on innovative methods of visualising the past. Developing web content requires a raft of techniques and can include integrated laser scanning, structure-from-motion photogrammetry, 360-degree imagery, 3D modelling of artefacts, photography, video, Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (drone) footage and illustration.

By using virtual object handling and making visual reconstructions of archaeology accessible, the information

3D render of silver sixpence coin of Queen Elizabeth I, dated 1577, found near the moat of Coleshill Mooted Manor, Warwickshire by archaeologist Chris Oakes. Credit: Wessex Archaeology; © HS2 Ltd



has wide appeal. A good example is the emerging imagery of the Curzon Street roundhouse; Tom Sparrow's article demonstrates the level of illustration now possible. Robert Stephenson's structure was at the Birmingham terminus of the London and Birmingham Railway (L&BR). It was lost under waves of building expansions, modifications and demolition, but thanks to excavation, its story as the world's first railway turntable and engine shed can re-emerge. The short film and drone footage on HS2's YouTube channel give a good background to the history and archaeology.

Online engagement has the potential to reach greater numbers with webinar attendance averaging one hundred, far greater than a typical public lecture, and at a fraction of the cost of traditional engagement. Webinars have been well received by stakeholders during archaeological excavations at Coleshill and Cubbington Wood, with Fosse Way, Packington Moor and Park Street to follow. One pleasing consequence of webinars featuring live links to archaeological sites is the enthusiasm of the teams in presenting discoveries direct from the field.

Skills in show-casing heritage

Visualising the past and show-casing heritage helps express its value graphically. This feeds into the project by demonstrating benefit, influencing design and creating a legacy.

Using a mix of media along with virtual and augmented reality are increasingly seen as important elements of community engagement, presenting good news stories and recognising the value of cultural heritage both within organisations and to communities and media in the outside world.

Not to be forgotten are presentation skills and storytelling, vital to communicating discoveries from site and their contribution to local and national heritage. Presentation will be important in the forthcoming conference, with a series of online mini lectures and discussion groups using specialists across archaeological teams from osteology and finds, to geoarchaeology and environmental. Sessions will be multimodal, using video, 3D imagery and photography. Exhibiting this range of expertise is valuable to the sector and to organisations, and has the potential to lead on to use of a diverse range of skills in post excavation, allowing international access to information from this multifaceted project.

HS2 continues to work closely with the Principal Contractor LM (a Laing O'Rourke & J Murphy & Sons Ltd joint venture), the enabling works design consultant WSP for heritage works (as part of the DJV) and archaeological companies such as Wessex Archaeology, Visualising Heritage (University of Bradford), Headland and MOLA Headland Infrastructure (MHI), Connect Archaeology and COPA to encourage participation and broadcast the historic dimension of HS2 in the Midlands.

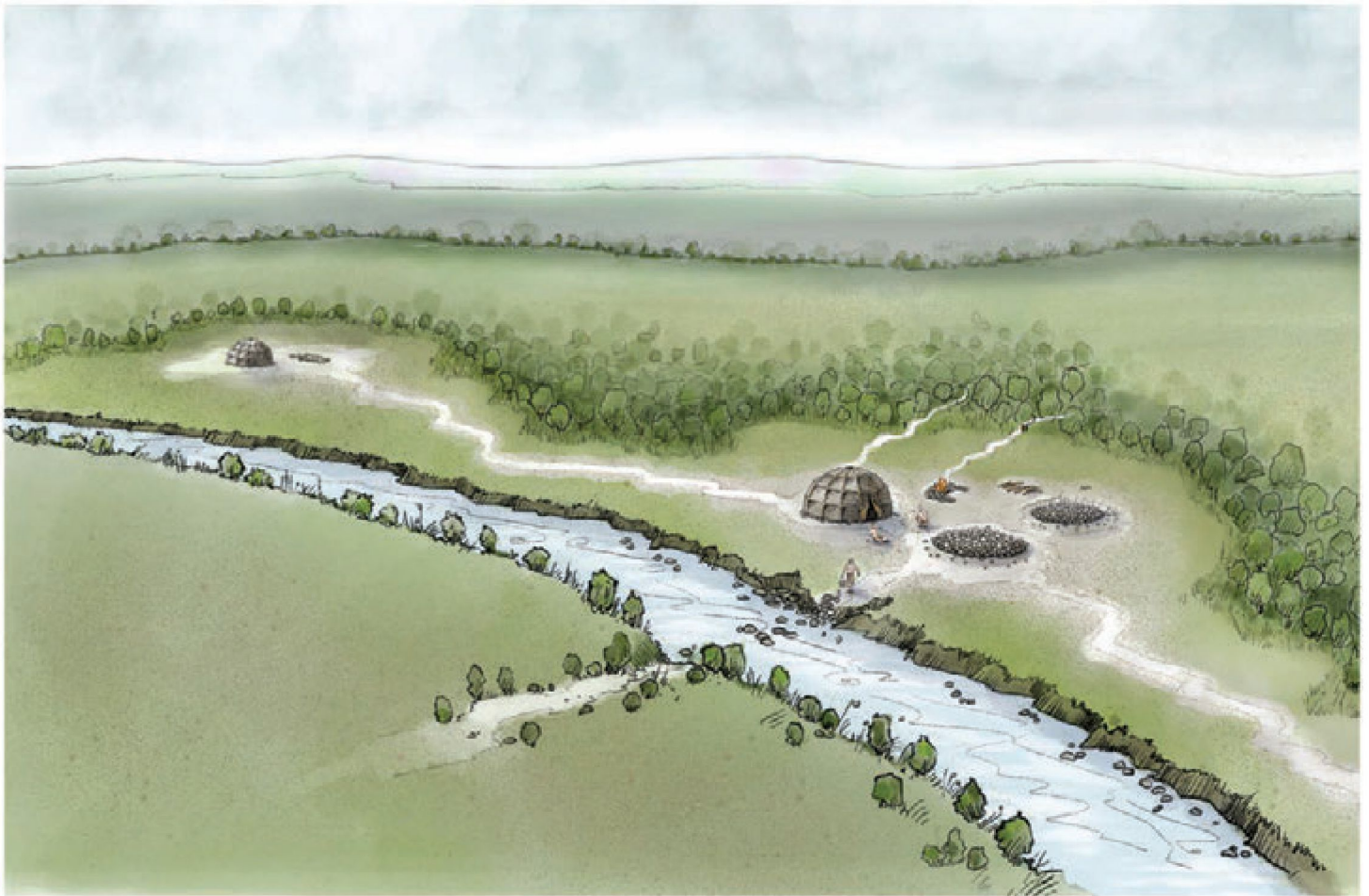


Illustration of Coleshill in the Bronze Age, reconstruction based on evidence of burnt mounds. Credit: Wessex Archaeology; © HS2 Ltd

Visualising the past and show-casing heritage helps express its value graphically.



Virtual reality headset being used at community drop-in session at Coleshill. Credit: Wessex Archaeology; © HS2 Ltd

Links

<https://www.gotostage.com/channel/wessexwebinars>
<https://www.wessexarch.co.uk/archaeology-online>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EYS7PPIY2ig&t=36s>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WkmshVABLGk>
<http://www.lm-jv.com/>
<https://www.wsp.com/>
<https://www.wessexarch.co.uk/>
<http://visualisingheritage.org/>
<https://headlandarchaeology.com/>
<https://molaheadland.com/>
<http://www.connectarchaeology.com/>
<http://www.coparchaeology.co.uk/>

Mary Ruddy

Mary is the WSP Cultural Heritage and Archaeology lead for Community Engagement. She has 20 years' experience in archaeology, heritage management, consultancy and research and has worked across the UK, in Spain, France, Albania and India.



Recognising the social value of heritage and archaeology, Mary has worked in schools, with the Coastal and Intertidal Zone Archaeological Network (CITIZAN) in Essex and on training excavations with Museum of London Archaeology in Iturissa, Spain.

Her underpinning interests are in Quaternary Science, geoarchaeology, Holocene environmental change, river evolution and reconstructing past landscapes. Publications include journal articles, contributions to monographs, technical guidance and articles in popular magazines.