



Weekend Courses 2023-24

Unexpected pasts: ancient discoveries that should not exist

Start date: 16 August 2024 **End date:** 18 August 2024

Venue: Madingley Hall
Madingley
Cambridge
CB23 8AQ

Tutor: Dr Matthew Symonds **Course Code:** 2324NRX046

Tutor biography

Matthew Symonds is an internationally respected archaeologist who has excavated at a range of sites in Europe. He undertook his doctorate on Classical Archaeology at the University of Oxford and has published widely on archaeological subjects around the world. His books include *Hadrian's Wall: creating division*, published by Bloomsbury Academic, and *Protecting the Roman Empire: fortlets, frontiers, and the quest for post-conquest security*, published by Cambridge University Press. He is the editor of *Current World Archaeology* magazine.

Course programme

Friday

Please plan to arrive between 16:30 and 18:30. You can meet other course members in the Terrace Bar which opens at 18:15. Tea and coffee making facilities are available in the study bedrooms.

19:00	Dinner
20:30 – 22:00	How ancient is ancient?
22:00	Terrace Bar open for informal discussion

Saturday

07:30	Breakfast (for residents only)
09:00 – 10:30	Ancient Egypt's pyramid scheme
10:30	Coffee
11:00 – 12:30	Taming time in Bronze Age Germany
13:00	Lunch
14:00 – 16:00	Free time
16:00	Tea
16:30 – 18:00	An ancient Greek clockwork computer
18:00 – 18:30	Free time
18:30	Dinner
20:00 – 21:30	Why build Hadrian's Wall?
21:30	Terrace Bar open for informal discussion

Sunday

07:30	Breakfast (for residents only)
09:00 – 10:30	Dispelling the Dark Ages at Sutton Hoo
10:30	Coffee
11:00 – 12:30	The lost world of jungle cities
12:45	Lunch

The course will disperse after lunch

Course syllabus

Aims:

The course will allow you to:

- learn about remarkable archaeological discoveries and monuments
- see how knowledge of the past can shift in ways once considered unthinkable
- appreciate the role of the present in shaping perceptions of the past

Summary of content:

Archaeology has a knack for springing surprises. This course will examine a selection of discoveries that should not, according to the prevailing wisdom of the time, have existed. Stunning finds such as the Sutton Hoo kingly burial and Nebra Sky Disc are justly celebrated for their splendour. But these treasures are equally significant for forcing a reappraisal of the societies that created or acquired such goods. The same can be true of less visually arresting, but equally momentous, discoveries such as the bronze gears of the Antikythera Mechanism and the faint earthworks of ancient cities concealed beneath jungle canopies. In the case of the Pyramids of Giza and Hadrian's Wall, the remains of the great monuments themselves are well known, but fresh knowledge of their contemporary context has changed our understanding of their impact. Painstaking study of multiple strands of evidence can also bring breakthroughs, with early attempts to understand ancient societies ultimately delivering a radically new perspective on the length and scope of human prehistory. At such times, archaeology forces us to confront unexpected pasts.

Focusing on a selection of key finds or findings will allow us to assess what they are, why they came about, and how they changed existing perceptions forever. Along the way, we will learn about some of the most extraordinary ancient artefacts and monuments ever created and consider how different forms of evidence are used to reconstruct accepted narratives about the past.

Presentation of the course:

The sessions will generally commence with illustrated talks by the tutor, who will introduce both the key themes for the session and the salient information about the concepts or finds that are being considered. At appropriate junctures there will be group discussion about the nature of these discoveries, points arising from them, and their wider significance.

As a result of the course, within the constraints of the time available, you should be able to:

- understand how perceptions of the past are created
- grasp the strengths and weaknesses of different disciplinary approaches
- appreciate how fresh evidence can refine or revolutionise our understanding
- know key case studies that have shifted perceptions of the past

Reading and resources list

Required reading: these are books / articles / sources that you must read prior to the course and are marked with an asterisk (*).

Darvill, T, *Prehistoric Britain*, (2nd edition), London, Routledge (2010) ISBN: 978 0415490276 (chapter 1 only, which is relevant to session 1 and also provides a useful overview of archaeological methodology) *

Recommended reading:

Carver, M, *The Sutton Hoo story: encounters with early England*, Woodbridge, The Boydell Press (2017) ISBN 978 1783272044 (especially chapters 1 and 2)

Freeth, T, 'The Antikythera Mechanism', *Current World Archaeology*, 108: 16-23 (2021) (freely available via the following link: <https://the-past.com/feature/the-antikythera-mechanism-an-ancient-greek-machine-rewriting-the-history-of-technology/>)

Prümers, H and Symonds, M F A, 'Lost cities of Bolivia: rethinking prehistoric life in the Amazon', *Current World Archaeology* 115: 16-22 (2022) (freely available via the following link: <https://the-past.com/feature/lost-cities-of-bolivia-rethinking-prehistoric-life-in-the-amazon/>)

Symonds, M F A, *Hadrian's Wall: creating division* London, Bloomsbury Academic (2021) ISBN 978 1350105348 (especially chapter 4)

Tallet, P, Lehner, M and Symonds, M F A, 'Records of the pyramid builders: discovering eyewitness accounts of a legendary construction project', *Current World Archaeology*, 112: 32-40 (2022)

Wilkin, N and Symonds, M F A, 'The Nebra Sky Disc: decoding a prehistoric vision of the cosmos', *Current World Archaeology*, 113: 40-43 (2022) (freely available via the following link: <https://the-past.com/feature/the-nebra-sky-disc-decoding-a-prehistoric-vision-of-the-cosmos/>)

Note: Institute of Continuing Education (ICE) students are entitled to 20% discount on books published by Cambridge University Press (CUP) which are purchased at the Press bookshop, 1 Trinity Street, Cambridge (Mon-Sat 9am – 5:30pm, Sun 11am – 5pm). A letter or email confirming acceptance on to a current ICE course should be taken as evidence of enrolment.

(Information correct as of 15 May 2023)