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Covid 19 Lockdown – Issue 5



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Haiflu

By **Kristen Lambert**
Nature & Wellbeing Project Officer

It was Mental Health Awareness Week a few weeks back, with the theme of Kindness. During that time, performance poet, Liv Torc was inviting people to have a go at writing a 'Haiflu'. This is her lockdown version of a 'Haiku', a form of Japanese poetry, made up of three phrases (5 syllables, 7 syllables and then 5 again).

In thinking about how nature and wildlife have helped you through these strange times, why not have a go at capturing a 'Haiflu' poem of your own?



It's very short and simple to do, so you don't have to be into your poetry or to have written one before.

Why not try and include some Bee, Butterfly and Bird references too?

Visit Liv Torc's website for more information about Project Haiflu:

www.livtorc.co.uk/?page_id=365

Discovering Dunkeswell Abbey: Past Industries Unearthed

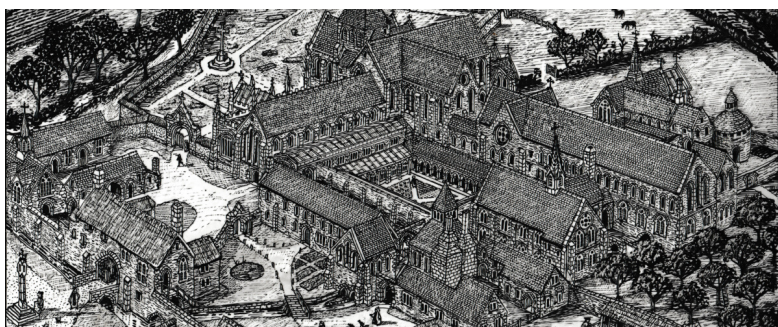
This project was run by Heritage Arts and People (HAP) CIC, in partnership with the Blackdown Hills AONB – Catherine Farnell, HAP

Dunkeswell Abbey was a Cistercian abbey complex founded in 1201 and was in occupation until its dissolution in 1539. The Cistercians would have chosen to build their Abbey at Dunkeswell because of its rural location and proximity to water, timber and other natural resources. A major strand of the Discovering Dunkeswell Abbey (DDA) project was to extend the existing body of knowledge of the Abbey and its history, alongside engaging the local community.

A river walking survey was carried out near the abbey in June 2019 as part of DDA's community archaeology programme. Volunteers helped to recover medieval floor tiles, peg tiles and building materials. At least one of the decorated floor tiles represented a previously unknown design. The discovery of tile wasters revealed completely new evidence for the production of plain peg-tiles (used in roofing) on the site. This discovery supported emerging evidence that the parishes around Dunkeswell supported a major ceramics industry in the medieval period and in the 16th century. The team wondered whether evidence of another industry – medieval iron working – might also be discovered.

Two test pits were excavated in November 2019 about 250m west of the abbey, in an area identified as a possible furnace/extractive site, targeting a linear earthwork and suspected slag deposit. The excavation revealed large quantities of dumped metal working waste: iron smelting slag, fragments of clay furnace lining and possible iron ore. The possible in-situ remains of a clay structure and potentially a smithing hearth bottom, were also discovered, suggesting on site iron working and production.

A sample taken from a sealed burnt layer had the potential for radiocarbon dating, so with a grant from the Blackdown Hills AONB, the material was processed and a radiocarbon date obtained. The radiocarbon determination for charcoal recovered from the sample returned a date in the late Roman Period (230–380AD). This is considerably earlier than had been anticipated. It is of a similar age to Roman iron working deposits recorded at another site 3km to the southeast. The presence of a possible Roman quern stone (used for grinding corn) is suggestive of additional associated settlement activity in the vicinity of the site.



Whilst the test pit did not provide a date for medieval iron working activity, the fact that late Roman iron working activity was taking place on the site was a very exciting discovery. Radiocarbon dates in the Early Medieval period have also been returned from metal working residues at the site 3km away, so we know that there was also medieval iron working activity in the area. The test pit investigation was small scale but very worthwhile and has highlighted the considerable potential for further investigation.

Do you know your AONB's?

(Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty)

QUANTOCK HILLS
BLACKDOWN HILLS
Two of the
AONB Family

1) Which was England's first Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty?

- a. Gower
- b. Surrey Hills
- c. Quantock Hills

2) There are three main AONB's that are wholly or partially in Somerset, Quantock Hills, Mendip Hills and Blackdown Hills. What is the total area of these three AONB's?

- a. 224km² / 94 square miles
- b. 633km² / 244 square miles
- c. 1,034km² / 399 square miles

3) Which is the largest AONB in the UK?

- a. Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs
- b. Chilterns
- c. Cotswolds

4) How much of the land cover of England and Wales do AONBs make up?

- a. 18
- b. 8
- c. 28

5) Which was the last AONB, to date, to be designated in 1995?

- a. Arnside and Silverdale
- b. Clwydian Range
- c. Tamar Valley

6) Which is the smallest AONB in the UK?

- a. Chichester Harbour
- b. Isle of Scilly
- c. Isle of Wight

7) Which is the most northerly AONB in the UK?

- a. North Pennines
- b. Solway Coast
- c. Northumberland Coast

8) What legislation, in 1949, led to the creation of AONBs?

- a. National Parks & Access to the Countryside Act
- b. National Parks and Access to Nature Act
- c. National Parks and Access to Health Act

9) How many AONBs have been subsumed to create new National Parks?

- a. 1
- b. 2
- c. 3

10) Currently how many AONBs are there in the UK?

- a. 46
- b. 48
- c. 52

A Future For Our Ash Woods?

By Bill Jenman

Quantock Hills Landscape Partnership Scheme Manager



Quantock Hills
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty



Driving or walking around the southern Quantocks today you can't help noticing the ash dieback. Whole ash woods are dying, with bare branches and thin canopies far worse this year than last.

Chalara dieback has been a concern since before it was first spotted in England in 2012, and has been spreading westwards since it devastated ash stands in Poland in 1992. Maybe it's just the passage of time, maybe it's the very wet winter followed by the hot dry spring, but this seems to be the year that has tipped Quantock's ash trees into full blown decline.

The disease, caused by the fungus *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*, kills the large majority of ash trees it infects – 90%+ death rates are often quoted. Sadly we must expect to see significant felling of ash trees in the next couple of years, especially along roadsides where they are a particular danger. The good news is that some ash trees, perhaps 5%, seem to be resistant. Interestingly, the infection is lowest where ash grows in a healthy mix of species in woodlands and hedgerows; it's the ash-dominated woods that are worst affected.

Ash dieback is just the latest of several new tree diseases to hit the UK in recent years. *Phytophthora* fungal species have been an increasing problem for alder, beech, horse chestnut, juniper, and larch. Acute Oak Decline, a complex disease caused principally by bacterial infection, has been hitting mature oak trees while Chronic Oak Decline (a slower killer as the name suggests) causes crown dieback and makes the tree more susceptible to other stresses like drought or infestations of oak processionary moth.

In the early to mid 70's devastation wrought by Dutch Elm disease meant the landscape of lowland England was changed forever, and the huge elm trees that framed and patterned the landscape were gone. Elm persists nowadays only as a hedgerow shrub that dies back when the stems get big enough for the bark beetles to bore in and spread the fungal spores.

Quite why so many new tree diseases have emerged in recent years is unclear. Climate change is almost certainly having a direct impact. Other factors like the accidental introduction of new diseases and pests and a generally more nutrient rich environment (from agriculture and the nitrogen compounds in vehicle exhausts) probably have a role too.

The Quantock Landscape Partnership Scheme will be working to increase the diversity of our ash woodlands and of hedgerow trees, and helping address some of the safety issues that dying ash trees near roads pose, at least on sites where the AONB is involved in management. Climate change resilience will be one of the things we think about when choosing which species to plant.

The Quantocks will look different in 10 or 50 years' time whether we like it or not, but by taking action now we can help to ensure it will still be as beautiful and diverse despite the changes.

The River Culm – A Historic Watercourse

Antony Firth, Fjordr Limited – Blackdown Hills AONB



"Keep an eye on connectingtheculm.com to find out more over the coming weeks"

Fjordr Limited has been working alongside the Connecting the Culm project to better understand the history and archaeology of the River Culm. The work has been funded by Historic England to make it easier to find out about the long history of human influence on rivers.

Using GIS, Fjordr has mapped and recorded over 1200 'Historic Watercourse Polygons' across the whole catchment of the Culm and its tributaries.

The HWP's have been identified from historic maps, lidar data, and a range of other archaeological and historical sources. They show places where there is evidence for people using the river and changing it to meet their needs at different points in time.

Apart from obvious modern alterations, the River Culm might appear quite timeless. In fact, the project shows how much the river has changed not just over the last hundred years or so, but over many centuries. Although historic maps may date back only to the 1840s, they often show features in the landscape that are likely to be much older, reaching back to Medieval times. The human history of the river is much older still – it would have been important right back into prehistory – but direct evidence is harder to find from the desk-based sources we have been using. However, it is likely that changes in how the landscape was used many thousands of years ago would have altered how water and sediment flowed through the catchment, and this would have changed both the river and the floodplain in significant ways. The character and richness of the Culm floodplain probably reflects several millennia of looking after meadows for hay and pasture, and maintaining woodland resources such as willow for withies and alder for dye.

The River Culm was very important as a source of waterpower from the Medieval period right through to the Twentieth Century. We have been identifying the extensive systems of leats – channels that brought water from the river and returned it downstream – which were essential for the mills to operate. Some of the changes made to the river to enable watermills to work can still be seen even if the mills themselves no longer survive.

A major change that probably took place in the Culm catchment in the 1700s and 1800s was the construction of water meadows: 'catchworks' on valley sides; and 'bedworks' on the floodplain. These required complex systems of ditches to spread water over the land and then collect it back together. The thin sheet of flowing water increased the productivity of the land. Although costly to construct and maintain, bedworks and catchworks were introduced widely across the Culm catchment and can be seen in lidar data.

Bringing data about the history of the River Culm together in one place will make it easier to understand the condition of the river and help in deciding how to address current issues. This knowledge will be shared with stakeholders and communities so that Connecting the Culm can arrive at solutions that go with the grain of the historic river. We will provide more details of this process on the website as Connecting the Culm progresses.

The Red Footed Falcon

A male red footed falcon (*Falco tinnunculus*) visited Cothelstone Hill last weekend, it was a beauty as you can see from the photos taken by Adrian Myram and his daughter. Also worth a look from Exeter Birder is this clip on youtube: <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=HX0iKFNJL4w>

The falcon will have been on it's way from Africa to their breeding grounds in eastern Europe (where they breed colonially) and the easterly winds brought it, as one of over 30 across the country, to our hills."



Quantock Hills & Blackdown Hills Word Search



POPPIES
GLOW WORMS
LARGE BLUE
LEVERET
LIZARD
SEA KALE
HORSEFLIES
BURNET MOTH
BUDDLEIA
HEATHER



Quiz Answers from page 3

1c) Quantock Hills 2b) 633km²/244 square miles
3c) Cotswolds 4a) 18 5c) Tamar Valley 6b) Isle of Scilly
7c) Northumberland Coast
8a) National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act
9c) 3 10a) 46



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Blackdown Hills
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty



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