

Buckingham University's Professor David Jacques wins *Current Archaeology's* prestigious Archaeologist of the Year award for 2023

Top honours at the prestigious *Current Archaeology Awards* have gone to **Professor David Jacques** from the University of Buckingham for his pioneering work at Blick Mead, a unique prehistoric occupation site located around a mile from Stonehenge.

David has been project director of Blick Mead since 2005, when initial excavations at the spring-side site spanned just one long weekend dig a year, and were carried out on a shoestring budget with the help of the local Amesbury community and other volunteers. Since then the project has evolved into a multi-university research effort that uses the latest state-of-the-art technology to shed new light on the origins of the Stonehenge landscape and life in Mesolithic Britain.

The initiative's discoveries have revolutionised our understanding of how the surrounding landscape was used in the centuries before Stonehenge was built, uncovering extensive evidence of hunter-gatherer communities coming together to create thousands of flint tools and to share elaborate feasts, while dating analysis has revealed Blick Mead to be the oldest and longest-used occupation site in the Stonehenge World Heritage Site, spanning c.8000-3600 BC, a unique range for north-western Europe).

David was named 2023's Archaeologist of the Year at the *Current Archaeology Live!* conference in London on Saturday 25 February, which was held in partnership with the University College London (UCL) Institute of Archaeology. It was the first in-person *CA Live!* event since the onset of Covid-19 restrictions (the 2021 and 2022 conferences were held online) and was attended by over 400 people.

Community engagement has been key to the dig's success, and its importance has been symbolised by the construction of Amesbury History Centre, which was created as a result of more than 90% of locals voting to increase their precept to pay for it.

This is not the first time that the Blick Mead team have received a *Current Archaeology Award*; they also won the prize for Research Project of the Year in 2018. While the work has been very much a team effort, though, David's colleagues see him as the lynchpin and catalyst behind the collective strength of the project, and he was nominated for the 2023 Archaeologist of the Year award as a representative of the investigations.

Accepting the award, David said: 'I really can't believe it – Gabor and Lilian [Dr Gabor Thomas and Lilian Ladle, the other two nominees for this year's award] are such obvious winners, so I am really taken aback. But this is for my friends, skilled archaeologists and really lovely people; all our volunteers; and the town of Amesbury, which is a very special community that has been so supportive of us.'

Notes for Editors: *Current Archaeology* Awards

- *Current Archaeology*, the UK's leading archaeology magazine announced the winners of their 2023 awards on 25 February as part of the annual *Current Archaeology Live!* conference, held this year at the UCL's Institute of Education in London.
- The awards were presented by archaeologist and educator Julian Richards (who previously headed the popular archaeological television programme *Meet the Ancestors*).
- The *Current Archaeology* Award for Archaeologist of the Year 2023 was sponsored by Andante Travels.
- Book of the Year 2023 (sponsored by the Ashmolean Museum) was awarded to Amanda Brend, Nick Card, Jane Downes, Mark Edmonds, and James Moore for *Landscapes Revealed: geophysical survey in the Heart of Neolithic Orkney World Heritage Area, 2002-2011*.
- Research Project of the Year 2023 (sponsored by Oxbow Books) was awarded to the University of Huddersfield and EASE Archaeology for their revelatory research into Bronze Age migration in Orkney ('Prehistoric pioneers: how female migrants changed the face of Bronze Age Orkney').
- Rescue Project of the Year 2023 (sponsored by Wessex Insurance Brokers Ltd) was awarded to The Lego Lost at Sea Project, for their pioneering work documenting and analysing millions of Lego pieces that are still washing up on British beaches after being lost overboard 25 years ago.
- Voted for by subscribers and members of the public, the awards recognise the outstanding contributions to our understanding of the past made by the people, projects, and publications featured in the pages of *Current Archaeology* over the previous 12 months.
- More information about the awards, including all winner and nominees, can be found at www.archaeology.co.uk/vote