

UNCOVERING THE PAST

History is about stories and time. In other words, it is about people and the past. It often involves mysteries which, in order to be solved, require investigation of evidence.

THE BOG BODY

On 13 May 1983 a load of peat was churned up by mechanical diggers working on Lindow Moss, in Cheshire, England. The peat was destined for a mill, where machines would remove the rubbish from it so that it could be turned into mushroom compost.

But for two of the mill workers this was not to be an ordinary day. As the machinery sifted and sorted the peat, a human foot was thrown out.

The men were horrified – had they uncovered a recent murder? Immediately the police were alerted. The mechanical diggers were stopped and attention was focussed on the area of peat that had been dug that morning. Sure enough, there was a human corpse, entirely naked, lying face down in the peat.

Who was it? How had the person died? How did the person come to be there?

These were questions which doctors and scientists had to answer. Read the reports which follow.

Report 1

Analysis of the layers of peat where the body was found showed that the layers of peat in the area were at least 2000 years old.

Report 2

A sample of bone was rushed to a laboratory to be examined by scientists. They gave the sample top priority. Their analysis of the rate of decay of the bone showed that the body was in fact about 2500 years old.

Report 3

The body was transported to London to be examined using the most modern technology available at the time. Scientists carefully peeled away sections of the peat. Many parts of the body had been badly squashed and damaged by the weight of the peat, but they uncovered perfect finger nails. They removed one of these and painted it with gold so they could examine it under a scanning electron microscope.

Report 4

At first the scientists weren't sure about the sex of the body. However, when they found a moustache they decided to call the body **Lindow Man**. Members of the team christened him **Pete Marsh** for fun. They examined one of his moustache hairs and found that it had been cut cleanly.

Report 5

Then came the day when they carefully turned the body over. A fresh examination showed a new horror – Lindow man had a garrotte or noose around his neck. An expert on knots suggested that this had been pulled tight by winding the rope around a stick.

Report 6

A surgeon was then brought in to remove the internal organs and examine them. The contents of the stomach were analysed. In the stomach doctors found fragments of cereal bran, mixed with small pieces of barley and wheat. They also spotted fragments of charcoal. Closer examination showed that Lindow Man had 'round worm' - a parasite in his stomach.

Report 7

Lindow Man had a hole in the top of his head. So, the scientists decided to examine the inside of his skull. Using a long thin tube with a magnifying lens on the end (called a fibre optic endoscope) they went in as deep as they could. They removed one of his wisdom teeth. This was greyish black in colour.

Report 8

But, they still hadn't really answered the question 'How was he killed?' A forensic scientist, who was used to studying bodies for the law courts, was called in. He examined the head wound and the garrotte. He also noticed a cut throat wound on the right side of his jaw. He decided that there had been three stages to Lindow Man's death:

- 1 He had been hit over the head twice to make him unconscious.
- 2 The noose had been pulled tight round his neck using a stick. This had broken his neck.
- 3 His throat had been slit to allow the blood to pour out.

Task:

Read through the scientist's reports carefully and, using the guidelines for writing an archaeologists report at the bottom of the page, write your own report.

Archaeologist's Report

- 1 When and where was Lindow Man's body found?
- 2 How was his body discovered?
- 3 How old is the body? Explain how scientists found this out.
- 4 Finger nails: Do you think Lindow man did rough work in the soil or worked with cloth?
- 5 Hair: Does the fact that the hair that was examined was cut cleanly tell us anything about the iron age people who lived at the same time as Lindow man?
- 6 What can we learn about his diet from the contents of his stomach?
- 7 What did the scientists find in his stomach?
- 8 Can you suggest why the fragments of charcoal had fragments of wheat and barley inside them?
(Clue: think about what we do with wheat)
- 9 Report 7 tells us about Lindow man's teeth. Do you think he was a young man or an old man?
Explain your answer.
- 10 Describe how Lindow man was killed.