

**Avebury and Stonehenge World Heritage Site  
Archaeological and Historical Research Group  
Draft Notes of Meeting 22<sup>nd</sup> January, 2016**

**Present:** Martyn Barber (Chair), Brian Edwards, Sarah Simmonds, Colin Shell, Dan Miles, Kerry Donaldson, Nick Baxter, Rachel Foster, Steve Marshall, Kate Fielden, Bob Clarke, Sian Williams, Gill Swanton Emily Banfield, Melanie Pomeroy-Kellinger, Josh Pollard, Katy Whitaker, Mark Bowden, Susan Greaney, Jim Leary, David Field, Matt Leivers, Jim Gunter, Jude Currivan, Olaf Bayer, Jonathan Last, Ian Barnes, Nick Snashall, Phil McMahon, Tim Darvill, Amanda Chadburn, Beth Thomas, David Roberts

**1. Apologies and Introductions**

**Apologies:** Dave Sabin, Nicola Hembrey, Abby George, David Dawson, Julie Scott-Jackson, Ros Cleal, Andrew David, Martin Papworth, Bruce Eagles, Heather Sebire

**New Members:** Tom Lyons was proposed by Martyn Barber and seconded by Brian Edwards. We hope to welcome him as a new member at the next meeting of ASHRG.

**2. Minutes and matters arising**

**2.1 Minutes**

The minutes were approved with minor amendments.

**2.2 Matters Arising**

All actions complete. Any relevant matters are covered elsewhere on the agenda.

**3. Monitoring of the Resource Agenda**

**3.1 Update on WHS Research Framework**

ML provided a brief progress update on SARF.

The document is very near completion. The only outstanding element is a revised built environment section which is expected in the near future. A foreword from the Chair of Historic England (HE) is under preparation. The document will be submitted to HE and the Project Board by the end of the month. Publication will take place in time for the launch of the document at the Stonehenge and Avebury WHS 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Conference on 19<sup>th</sup> November 2016.

## **4. Current archaeological & historical research**

### **4.1 Between the chalk: Marden and Wilsford Season 1 - Jim Leary**

JL reported on the excavation last summer with the University of Reading Field School in the Vale of Pewsey between Stonehenge and Avebury. The excavations focused on two prehistoric henge monuments (Marden and Wilsford) and, with HE, a Roman settlement. It also surveyed part of medieval Marden village.

Marden henge is a huge monument, enclosing an area of 15.7 hectares, making it the largest Neolithic henge in Britain. The excavations focused to the south end of the monument and uncovered an extraordinarily well-preserved Neolithic building surface. The complete surface was rectangular with a central sunken area dominated by a large hearth. On the floor were flint flakes still lying untouched in the position they had been left in in one of the best preserved Neolithic buildings in England. Close to the building were spreads of Neolithic rubbish, including elegant bone needles, as well as flint flakes and decorated 'Grooved Ware' pottery. In one area was an assemblage of bones from numerous pigs, clearly representing the remains of a feast. Analysis of the building is ongoing. We do not yet know what it was used for, although it may have been a sweat lodge type building.

Wilsford henge on the other side of the river was also excavated. This is a much smaller monument completely flattened by ploughing over the centuries. It was excavated through the end of the ditch, next to the entrance of the henge, which was amazingly deep at over three metres. Near the bottom was a very well preserved early Bronze Age burial of a teenager wearing an amber spacer necklace.

The striking feature about these monuments is their relationship with the River Avon, which runs between them. Both monuments face the river, as if access or good views of this part of the river were important. Marden henge in particular sits within a large sweeping meander of the river. The relationship between these monuments and water was evidently a close one and likely to be key to understanding them. In order to better understand the hydrology of the river in the past, a geoarchaeological project was undertaken along the river valley. This work has produced some very exciting results, including thick layers of peat, and will no doubt add significantly to our knowledge.

Under the guidance of staff from HE a detailed topographic survey was undertaken of an earthwork site located within Marden village. The grass-covered site comprises a series of enclosures of varying size, within which a number of building platforms and a network of tracks or hollow-ways have been identified. The enclosures clearly represent multiple phases of activity, with some of the enclosure banks overlying or reusing earlier features. At the eastern end of the site, two small terraced building platforms were recorded associated with a number of small compounds; these earthworks probably represent the remains of a small deserted medieval farmstead. This site is clearly complex and multifaceted, and interpretation work is ongoing.

The area around Marden henge has seen very little archaeological work. In addition there are many other monuments preserved in the Vale of Pewsey, particularly along the upper reaches of the River Avon. These monuments will all be investigated over the coming seasons. The team is looking forward to going back next summer.

In response to questions JL indicated that great effort had been put into the construction of the floor of the Neolithic building. Radio carbon dating from charcoal and animal bones will indicate the length of use. JC suggested that rather than a sweat lodge, which is normally temporary, the building could be compared to a kiva from southwest USA which is a more permanent structure. JP asked about the stratigraphic position of the Neolithic house in relation to the bank of the henge. It appears to be under the artificial bank.

SM added that although springs were flowing southeast of the henge in December here was now no water flowing under the Hatfield Barrow. William Witherington recorded a spring flooding the ditch in the eighteenth century. DF has photos of this in previous years.

#### **4.2 Stonehenge World Heritage Site - landscape survey south of the A303 - Historic England**

Phil McMahon reported that Historic England (HE) is presently undertaking the first phase of what is envisioned to eventually be a three-phase study of the part of the Stonehenge WHS which lies to the south of the A303 trunk road. Around two thirds of the Stonehenge WHS lies south of the road and the formidable barrier it presents to visitors appears also to some extent to have deterred archaeological research. Given the substantial increase over the past two decades in our understanding of the archaeology of the WHS north of the A303, it was felt that there was a pressing need to better understand the nature of the heritage in the southern part of the WHS. This is due to a number of HE business strands including development management, heritage at risk and designation factors. Whilst the ultimate aim is to look at the whole of the WHS south of the A303 and a nominal 1km-wide buffer beyond the WHS boundary, the initial phase of research is focused on a c. 1.5km wide corridor running parallel with the current A303. This is the broad corridor within which it is possible that the Government may seek to develop a bored tunnel road improvement for the A303 in future years. HE has identified a strategic need to have advance knowledge of any previously unknown, nationally-important archaeological sites & monuments within this corridor so that we can consider their protection and management well ahead of any scheme proposal coming forward, in addition to informing our strategies for responding to threats to archaeology through arable ploughing, burrowing animals, unmanaged tree growth and other erosive processes.

This initial phase of work is being undertaken in-house by Historic England and has been a multi-disciplinary study, utilising a range of remote, non-invasive and invasive techniques. Targeted archaeological excavation has included a high-level of

palaeo-environmental sampling and scientific dating techniques and the post-excavation analysis now to take place will in due course help inform methodologies for future phases of research. In this respect phase 1 has acted as a pilot for techniques that may prove useful in future phases. Given the size of the study area and HE's capacity to undertake large, landscape-scale projects of this type, it is likely that we will be seeking academic partners to help develop and deliver future phases of the survey.

Mark Bowden thanked David Jacques for his assistance with negotiating access to Vespasian's Camp for analytical earthwork survey of this site. Work began before Christmas and the rather complex control survey was completed in the New Year, with detail survey of the part of the monument to the south of Stonehenge Road also complete. Detailed survey of the northern part of the hillfort will begin before the end of January. This hillfort has not previously been surveyed to modern standards. Early indications are that more of the 18<sup>th</sup>-century landscaping survives than previously thought and that there are some previously unrecorded earthworks outside the north-western side of the fort.

Dave Roberts reported that HE have also undertaken a series of small scale excavations following up on work by the HE geophysics team, aiming to better characterise a sample of unprotected archaeological features in the study area. A range of prehistoric features have been excavated including several boundary ditches, enclosures, areas of pitting (including a significant Neolithic pit cluster), a possible long barrow and a sinkhole. Finds include large assemblages of worked flint and prehistoric pottery. This work will be reported on at the end of assessment stage in May, and reports will be deposited with the Wiltshire HER. Further analysis work will take place after May.

#### **4.3 New work at Robin Hood's Ball: geophysical and photogrammetric survey, summer 2015 - Olaf Bayer**

OB reported that gradiometer, earth resistance and magnetic susceptibility surveys of Robin Hood's Ball causewayed enclosure and adjacent monuments were carried out by staff and students from Oxford University's Department for Continuing Education in summer 2015.

Key results of the survey included a large number of potential pits of unknown date both inside and outside the Neolithic enclosure circuits, an element of possible mid Bronze Age field system abutting the causewayed enclosure, and a second ring ditch within one of the Early Bronze Age round barrows to the north of the causewayed enclosure. The surveys also showed traces of presumed post-medieval ploughing either side of the Shrewton/ Figheldean parish boundary, and numerous traces of 20<sup>th</sup> century military activity. Digital elevation models derived from both a UAV based photogrammetric survey and Environment Agency lidar data show low earthworks relating to the surrounding Bronze Age field system to be more complex and extensive than previously mapped from aerial photography.

## **5. Review of Current Opportunities for Dissemination of Research including recent/forthcoming publications**

### **5.1 Stonehenge and Avebury Biographical Dictionary – Brian Edwards**

BE reported that he had received three or four offers to write up individuals after his announcement of the project at the last ASHRG meeting. He emphasises that he is not looking for an essay but a short piece of around 300 words. He is interested in major characters such as Stukeley as well as lesser known marginal individuals. DB has offered to do AC Smith and RC will be covering a number of antiquarian vicars.

JL suggested putting the Biographical Dictionary on the web as a wiki. This should get the momentum going and also enable speedy review and editing. It will also provide a format that will further encourage people to submit entries and see what has already been done.

**ACTION: All interested in writing a short biographical entry to contact BE  
BE to explore putting the project online as a wiki**

### **5.2 WHS 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary: A History of the WHS in 30 Objects**

SS explained that alongside the planned WHS conference to celebrate the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary on 19<sup>th</sup> November 2016 partners are helping to organise a programme of events over the year. This could include badging planned events that relate to the WHS with the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary logo. In addition the WHSCU will be putting together an online exhibition of objects related to the WHS. This is inspired by the British Museum History of the World in 100 Objects.

SS asked members of ASHRG to send in ideas for objects that could be included in the online exhibition and which would appeal to a wide audience. The object could be held by a local or national museum or be from any other source as long we have permission to put an image of it on the internet.

The object should tell a story about a key moment in the history of the WHS or the development of our understanding of it. It could also reflect attributes of outstanding universal value such as for example the relationship of monuments to the landscape or astronomy or their influence on artists and architects. Another option is an object that reveals other values related to the WHS or how it is understood today in popular culture or from a spiritual perspective. The suggestion should be accompanied by a short text of c. 150 words explaining the importance/relevance of the object and the story it tells about the WHS.

Please also provide a caption and any relevant copyright details to appear alongside the image.

Thirty images will be chosen from the suggestions received with the aim of reflecting the widest range of stories/associations and types of objects.

**ACTION: All to send suggestions for objects and short text to SS by the end of March 2016**

## **6. Other research opportunities (i.e. development-led archaeology, utilities)**

### **6.1 County Archaeology update**

#### **6.1.1 Rebasing and RAML**

RF reported that the Archaeology Service is involved in pre-application discussion.

#### **6.1.2 Avebury**

No significant applications at present

## **7. Review of monitoring (e.g. need for condition surveys, Management Plan actions)**

### **7.1 Stonehenge and Avebury WHS Management Plan**

SS reported that initial scoping was beginning to inform the production of the WHS Setting Study. The setting study for Bath WHS is an important example of best practice that will be referred to.

The Setting Study is a priority project for the WHS particularly with significant developments possible in the setting in the near future. The study is also an important step to allow completion of the WHS boundary review at Stonehenge.

ASAHRG will be consulted as relevant during the production of study.

## **8. Representative's report and review of content of report to WHS Steering Committees and Partnership Panel**

### **8.1 Reports from WHS Steering Committees/Partnership Panel**

- CS reported that the WHSPP are considering how to achieve sustainable funding for the WHS Coordination Unit. In addition to this there is a plan to establish a charity or trust for Stonehenge and Avebury.
- The Royal Artillery Museum now includes environmental and archaeological elements and is called the Salisbury Plain Heritage Centre. This is necessary for HLF funding that is being sought. The final position of the Centre is still under discussion.
- The position of the two messes on a sports field near Knighton Barrow needs careful consideration. Currently there are only two non-permanent sheds and trees on the sight line to Stonehenge. Establishing sight lines is a priority for the Setting Study.

### **8.2 Report to the WHS Steering Committees/Partnership Panel**

- Progress on SARF
- HE research in landscape south of A303

## **9. Opportunities for site/exhibition/archive visits in 2015**

- Durrington Walls excavation in August
- Marden in summer, 2016.
- BE suggested a social/visit in the autumn to the Ashmolean in Oxford. It may be possible to use the meeting rooms at the Sackler. We could have lunch at the museum. The group expressed interest.

**ACTION: BE to explore possibility for Ashmolean visit in the autumn**

## **10. AOB**

### **10.1 Open Farm Sunday Manor Farm, Avebury Trusloe**

GS reported that this will take place on 5<sup>th</sup> June. The WHS will be represented with a focus on its 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.

### **10.2 Wiltshire Archaeology Conference**

This will take place on Saturday, 16<sup>th</sup> April in the Corn Exchange, Devizes.

### **10.3 Well at Avebury**

SM expressed disappointment that the old unlined well that had opened up at Avebury had been backfilled before there was an opportunity to monitor the water level. NS explained that it had had to be filled for health and safety reasons as it represented a severe risk adjacent to an area of permissive access land. NS inspected and photographed the well before it was filled in.

The well was probably originally dug for watering sheep.

### **10.4 Research into the legacy Countryside Stewardship Special Project**

AC asked for feedback on what was happening at the end of the special rate scheme that had been offered to farmers for arable reversion in the WHS. She is researching whether farmers have chosen to remain in stewardship agreements under the new schemes.

**ACTION: SS, BT and others to contact AC with details.**

### **10.5 Historic Environment and Well-being**

JL reported that a PhD student at Reading is undertaking research into how the historic environment affects well-being. She will be focussing on the WHS at Stonehenge and Avebury and will be in touch in due course. It would be very helpful if we could work with her to explore this subject. SS would be happy to assist her.

### **10.6 Avebury Connecting Worldwide**

SS reported on an initiative by a group of local people in Avebury who are interested in exploring the wide range of interdisciplinary ideas related to the WHS. This will cover a wide range of questions and concepts outside an archaeological or historical focus. They are considering producing a series of TED-style talks covering these areas. They are looking for feedback and ideas on a prospectus they have prepared.

The group expressed interest in seeing the prospectus.

**ACTION: SS to circulate the Avebury Connecting Worldwide prospectus.**

### **10.7 Antiquity Paper**

CS reported that the paper on the bluestones quarry sites at Rhos-y-felin has been published in Antiquity.

### **11. Date and venue of next meeting**

10.30 AM on Friday, 20<sup>th</sup> May, 2016. Venue tbc.