

WINTER 2020 | 8TH EDITION

MEGALITH

Stonehenge and Avebury World Heritage Site Newsletter



Welcome to Megalith 2020

EDITED BY SARAH ASKHAM

Welcome to the 2020 edition of Megalith, the newsletter for the Stonehenge and Avebury World Heritage Site. Due to the Coronavirus pandemic this year has been very different, and many of us have altered the way we both work and live. As a result of adapting to a more virtual working life, albeit one which has led to proficiency on Microsoft Teams (I can now change my background to make it appear as if I'm in the World Heritage Site!) I thought it pertinent to examine the way Megalith, as a newsletter was produced. As a result, Megalith 2020 has been produced online in favour of the usual hard copy. This edition is a more streamlined newsletter focusing on articles that give updates and insights on life in the WHS over the course of the pandemic and I want to thank all those that have contributed. The unit will be producing a fuller version of Megalith in the Spring of next year and I would welcome any feedback, ideas and contributions.

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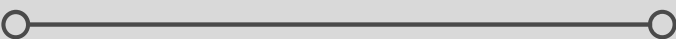
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INTRODUCTION & WHS

COORDINATION UNIT UPDATE



Written by Sarah Askham



The World Heritage Site itself has seen its fair share of change over the last year, from how partners and landowners carry out their operations to how visitors experience the landscape. This year the Summer Solstice, an extremely important spiritual event for the World Heritage Site, was affected by restrictions imposed by the coronavirus pandemic. Rather than cancel the event entirely, English Heritage worked tirelessly to change how it was delivered so that many of us could still enjoy both the Sunrise and Sunset over Stonehenge virtually. On page 7 Heather Sebire, Senior Historic Property Curator for Stonehenge at English Heritage, has written an article detailing the successes of this 2020's virtual solstice.

The Stonehenge and Avebury World Heritage Site Coordination Unit has experienced change, not only in how we deliver our work, but also in who delivers it. In June, we sadly said goodbye to the Partnership Manager Sarah Simmonds, who has been with the World Heritage Site for the last 14 years. Sarah's innovation, passion and enthusiasm has been an instrumental benefit to both the Coordination Unit and the World Heritage Site and so, on behalf of all the partners within the WHS, I want to take the opportunity to wish Sarah all the best for the future and to thank her for all that she has done for us. However, in Sarah's place we now have a new Partnership Manager, Anne Carney, and on behalf of all the partners within the WHS, I excitedly welcome Anne to the unit this December. An introduction to Anne, her background and experience can be found on page 4.

Looking to the new year even more change could be in store given the latest DCO decisions by the Secretary of State on the A303 road scheme. On page 8 Highways England have given an update on these developments for Megalith 2020 and I hope this may provide more details on the scheme. Another future change for 2021 will be the new post-Brexit agri-environment scheme that will replace Countryside Stewardship with the new Environmental Land Management (ELM) Scheme. The Coordination Unit is looking forward to working in partnership with landowners and farmers within the World Heritage Site to provide support to the new ELM Scheme so that the schemes benefits can be fully utilised.

As we navigate through this pandemic and restrictions begin to ease, we can start to reflect on some of the positives that 2020 and the changes of the coronavirus pandemic has brought. On page 12, I have written an article reflecting on the pros and cons of the pandemic in general, and on page 10 an article by Alistair Sommerlad, the chair of the Stonehenge and Avebury Partnership Panel, will reflect on these from a World Heritage Site perspective.

This newsletter's publication comes at the end of my first year in post as the Partnership Officer. Although this has been a challenging year, I have embraced the situation and thoroughly enjoyed getting to know partners, collaborating on landscape wide projects and expanding my knowledge on all aspects of World Heritage. Whilst the true impact of the pandemic is still to be seen, we can feel hopeful that there are still many positive changes to take into the future for the heritage sector. So, join me in waving goodbye to 2020 and welcoming 2021 and all the opportunities that it will bring.

INTRODUCING ANNE, THE NEW WHS PARTNERSHIP MANAGER

Written by Anne Carney





I grew up in Northern Ireland during the troubles and I have now lived longer in England than in Ireland. I spent a large part of my childhood in Downpatrick surrounded by a range of historic sites which I must admit I took for granted at the time.

Some sites, such as Saul Church and Struell Wells are associated with St Patrick who came to this part of Ireland in 432 A.D. For me, however, the most memorable sites are the megalithic tombs, standing stones and the stone circles that litter the landscape. My dad didn't seem to get much time off work but I remember that he always took my sister and I to one of these sites for a picnic each Easter. My favourite was the stone circle at Ballynoe. This could have been because my sister and I got to eat our Easter eggs in amongst the stones! To reach the stone circle you had to walk along a magical sunken lane, which in my young mind fairies lived and I still remember the sense of wonder I felt coming out of the green tunnel into the field with the stones. I also remember being annoyed that my dad (whom I thought knew everything) didn't know who put the stones there or why. It would be some years before I would find out more about these types of monuments.

Ballynoe Stone Circle is thought to be modelled on the circle at Swindale in Cumbria which is at the same latitude. It is elliptical in shape and consists of over 50 stones up to 1.8 metres high (though many are smaller) which is 35 metres across at its widest point. A portalled entrance is aligned on the setting sun half-way between midwinter and midsummer (around March 21st), and the setting sun at the winter solstice goes down between the Mountains of Mourne. In addition to visiting Ballynoe again at the winter solstice, a visit to see the amazing archaeology of the Hebrides is high on my wish list.

I studied Ecology at The University of Ulster followed by a Masters degree in Applied Ecology at Southampton University where I met my husband at pottery class! During my career I have worked for range of organisations including a Wildlife Trust, a Groundwork Trust (an urban fringe regeneration charity), several Local Authorities and the Rural Community Council for Hampshire. For the last 15 years I have worked for the Cranborne Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Partnership and during that time I have undertaken a number of different roles, projects and tasks.

I have substantial experience of developing and sustaining partnerships, undertaking management plan reviews, carrying out public consultations, fundraising, setting up charities and working with communities.

Having worked for two protected landscapes I am familiar with looking at the landscape in a holistic manner. I am also aware of the range of issues that threaten its special character, many of which mirror with those found at the Stonehenge and Avebury World Heritage Site.

I live in Salisbury and have three grown up children, one of whom lives in Australia. The other member of our family is an elderly dog called Charlie who sadly can't manage long walks any more.

I am looking forward to getting to grips with some of the challenges facing the World Heritage Site and hope it is not too long before I can meet many of you in person.





BALLYNOE STONE CIRCLE, NORTHERN IRELAND

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It is thought that the Ballynoe stone circle dates back to the Neolithic period. The original site was further modified during the Bronze Age when a burial mound was constructed within the main stone circle.



STONEHENGE SUMMER SOLSTICE 2020



Written by Heather Sebire



At the Winter Solstice last December 2019 I was very pleased to be able to capture the rising sun coming from the north eastern horizon. At the time I thought it must be a good omen for the new year of 2020 to come - little did I know what was ahead of us all.

This was the last time English Heritage were able to grant access to Stonehenge for anyone wishing to mark Solstice at the monument, because of measures to combat Covid-19, including our pagan and Druid friends for whom it is a very spiritual place.

The summer solstice is particularly significant and so we decided to live stream the sunset and the sunrise on our digital channels, so this year, those waiting and watching were experiencing the movements of the sun from the comfort of their own homes.

More than 5 million people watched the Summer Solstice sunset and sunrise across the English Heritage social media channels. There was a decent sunset with an interesting sky but the weather was very wet for the nonetheless atmospheric sunrise. Despite the weather on the Sunday morning viewing figures for the live stream reached 3.6 million! More people tuned in after the event and so these figures increased still further over the following days.

It was fantastic to see people's comments and enthusiasm for Stonehenge as they enjoyed the digital experience. The live streaming was free but viewers generously donated to the charity during the night. 104,000 new followers were added to English Heritage social channels, which meant we then had over 1 million subscribers for our award-winning YouTube account.

Hopefully it will not be too long until the equinoxes and solstices can be celebrated at Stonehenge as they have for centuries.

A303 STONEHENGE SCHEME GIVEN THE GREEN LIGHT

Written by Highways England

UK Transport Secretary Grant Shapps has given the formal green light for work to start on the A303 Stonehenge scheme, which includes a two-mile tunnel under the Stonehenge section of the Stonehenge, Avebury and Associated Sites World Heritage Site.

The scheme will remove the existing road past Stonehenge, preserving the landscape and returning Stonehenge to something like its original setting.

Highways England has selected Wessex Archaeology, one of the largest contractors in the sector with extensive experience of working in the WHS, as its archaeology specialists to undertake the mitigation work. The next few months will be spent planning for the fieldwork which is expected to start in late spring next year.

Highways England Project Director Derek Parody said: “It is a scheme objective to conserve and enhance the World Heritage Site and this is being achieved through close collaborative working with heritage groups, including English Heritage, National Trust, Historic England with expert advice from an independent Scientific Committee of archaeologists.”





“To help raise awareness of the importance of the archaeology and landscape, we plan to run an extensive Public Archaeology and Community Engagement (PACE) programme. Local communities and visitors to Stonehenge will be encouraged to learn about and engage with the heritage of the area. The World Heritage Site Coordination Unit will help guide this engagement as a member of a PACE Steering Committee.”

Highways England is working with the World Heritage Site Partners to leave a lasting legacy that will benefit local residents and visitors alike, and has funded the Steering Committee to undertake the “Exploring the WHS and Beyond project” in which WHS partners are working together to create a joint vision for the future of the WHS.

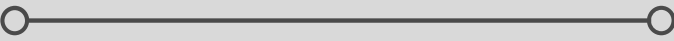
Through this collaborative approach, strategies have started to be developed for sustainable tourism, transport and land access, which build on actions from the World Heritage Site Management Plan 2015.

Highways England’s £1.7 billion upgrade of the A303 between Amesbury and Berwick Down includes:

- 8 miles of free-flowing, high-quality dual carriageway.
- a twin-bore tunnel 2 miles long underneath the World Heritage Site, closely following the existing A303 route, avoiding important archaeological sites, and avoiding intrusion on the view of the setting sun from the stones during the winter solstice.
- a new bypass to the north of the village of Winterbourne Stoke, with a viaduct over the River Till valley.
- new junctions with the A345 and A360 either side of the World Heritage Site.

For more information visit the Highways England website at:
<https://highwaysengland.co.uk/our-work/a303-stonehenge/>

LOOKING BACK AT THE WHS WITH 2020 VISION



Written by Alistair Sommerlad



There are plenty of reasons to hurry along to 2021 and not look back. Before we do, I am going to take the opportunity to have a last look at 2020 and drag the good news out of it. Those are the bits I want to take with me into next year.

If I had to be locked down anywhere, a World Heritage Site is a pretty privileged place to be constrained. Of the many good things to come out of the year, most are about what stopped. The clouds left us in March, revealing no aeroplane trails. The noise of traffic vanished and I heard what had been there all along – skylarks, rooks and even village church bells – but had been drowned out. The smell and sting of pollution stopped and, helped by the end of roadside mowing, wild flowers made a hurried comeback. They attracted butterflies which attracted birds. We all stopped getting in the way of hare and Great Bustard, both of which took the opportunity to visit Stonehenge whilst the ticket booths were silent. Otters bred and fed unperturbed in the rivers around the site.

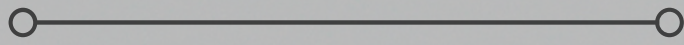
All this natural excitement was set against a backdrop of a landscape record of human activity stretching back many tens of thousands of years, which is as much a record of what we stopped doing as of what we have done. Nature needed little encouragement to take over where we had temporarily left off. We should perhaps focus more on stopping than on starting. Some of the questions we need to ask ourselves in the World Heritage Site are very complex and have direct impacts on the landscape and on people immediately. Yet we are programmed to start any new situation with ‘what shall we do ?’, without asking ‘what shall we stop doing?’

The best route out of crisis for the World Heritage Site is for all those involved in its care to work together. We need to understand where our interests converge and where they conflict, and we need to be aware of how we can help others in order that they can find ways to help us. That calls for partnership. Just as in private life, relationships where partners have invested time and effort in the good times cope best with stress.

The World Heritage Site Partnership Panel has over the past year commissioned studies into a variety of ways to ensure that tourism and transport can be improved whilst reducing the damage they can cause to the site. An important element is how all our visitors – international, national and local – access the site. We have also looked at sensible strategies to manage the animals which burrow into archaeological remains.

We all know change is a constant but it does seem this year as if we have had, and will continue to face, more than we have been used to. Partnership will see us through it.

THE GREAT BUSTARD OF STONEHENGE



This photo was taken by a friend of Alistair's whilst walking near to Stonehenge during the peace and quiet of the Lockdown. We doubt Great Bustards often get the place to themselves.



MISFORTUNES AND MARVELS OF THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC



Written by Sarah Askham



Change has been the operative word for all of us during the coronavirus pandemic, and with it we have seen some seismic changes to our daily lives. These changes have resulted in many downsides: we haven't been able to see our colleagues, friends and families, education has been disrupted, unemployment is rising, and the economy is contracting. All this may pose many unanswered questions for the future, particularly for the heritage sector which has been significantly impacted by the coronavirus lockdowns.

A survey conducted by the Heritage Alliance has found that 98% of heritage organisations have been impacted by the pandemic, with the remaining 2% expecting some future impact. Many heritage sites have been forced to close during lockdown and further restrictions have resulted in a decrease in visitor numbers, staff absences, a lack of volunteer availability and the cancellation of many events. All this has resulted in a loss of revenue that raises concerns over many organisations long-term viability.

However, as the hope of a vaccine has now turned into reality and restrictions begin to ease across the U.K. we can now see that there have also been some positive sides to the pandemic that provide both hope and opportunity to our lives in the future. For example, there has been a drop in air pollution; the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs have found that in the first few weeks of the coronavirus lockdown dangerous pollutants, like Nitrogen Oxide, were cut by 40% in towns and cities. These improvements in air quality have not only improve quality of human life, but also have the potential to improve many biodiversity and environmental issues worldwide.

People have also spent more time outside, and a study by the University of Cumbria has found that nature has become more important to people since the start of the pandemic. People have found more of a connection to nature through all the senses (sight, sound and smell) which has meant many spending significantly increased amounts of time outside in parks, gardens and rural areas. These changes have had a variety of health and wellbeing benefits, as well as a shift in attitude towards nature which has become more important to people, who feel protecting it is now a higher priority. The Centre for National Parks also found an increased interest in global environmental issues during the lockdown, with people having more intention to participate in local actions such as encouraging nature in gardens and yards.

Whilst all these changes are important in how we respond to environmental issues as a society, they also present many opportunities for heritage sites and organisations to both respond to and harness in order to help with economic and social recovery after the pandemic.

CONTRIBUTIONS

Thankyou to the following people who have contributed to this edition of Megalith:

Andrew Clark, Marcia Daniels, Bean Eagleston and all the team at
Highways England
Anne Carney
Alistair Sommerlad
Heather Sebire
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If anyone would like to contribute to the next edition, please contact the unit using the details below.

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United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



Stonehenge, Avebury
and Associated Sites
inscribed on the World
Heritage List in 1986