

AVEBURY ARCHAEOLOGICAL & HISTORICAL RESEARCH GROUP

Notes of a meeting held at the Study Centre, Avebury
On Friday 12th September 2003

1. Present

Gill Swanton (Chair); Peter Fowler; Melanie Pomeroy-Kellinger; Ros Cleal; Sian Williams; Brian Edwards; Sue Farr; John Barrett; Dave McOmish; Sue Smith; Dave Field; David Wheatley; Martyn Barber; Andy Crockett (Wessex Archaeology).

2. Apologies

Amanda Chadburn; Brian Davison; Andrew David; Paul Robinson; Mark Corney; Rob Mimmack; Jonathan Last; David Thackray; Andrew Lawson; Fatchna McAvoy; Sue Davies; Simon Crutchley; Mark Bowden; Kate Fielden ; Mike Pitts; Paul Cripps; Sarah Cross; Colin Shell; Julie Scott-Jackson.

3. Notes of Last Meeting (15th July) & Matters Arising

It was noted that KF had sent some comments on the notes of the last meeting by email.

4. Fieldwalking-Draft Policy Document

MPK circulated copies of the final draft version of the document which, if approved, will be relevant to both the Avebury and Stonehenge WHS. This has been amended to take on board comments made at the last meeting. The document will be circulated to interested individuals and a consultation period will be open until the end of October.

Discussion

RC commented that the new section added about walking transects as an option completely changes the earlier approach.

PF remarked that having an agreed policy in place will help us to compare results across the Avebury and Stonehenge landscapes.

5. Countryside Stewardship- Update and report on fieldwalking results

MPK reported on the new areas put down to grass this year as part of Stewardship. This includes part of the barrow cemetery at Beckhampton Hill, land adjacent to the Ridgeway at Overton Hill and the field containing the western part of the "Headlands" Iron Age enclosure.

Andy Crockett, project manager for Wessex Archaeology gave a brief report on the finding of the programme of fieldwalking these areas during the last two weeks. This work has been funded by English Heritage. He circulated density maps of the material pick up from the transects walked. The red dots are graded according to the weight of material (per hectare). The analysis has been done yet so the maps will be amended once this is done. 16 transects were walked per hectare, with a total of 50 square metres covered per hectare. This coverage will allow for comparison with the results for the fieldwalking carried out in the Stonehenge area.

There are no big surprises in the results, except for one concentration of material a few hundred metres east of the Ridgeway, just north of the quarry pit. The finds are largely undiagnostic (except one leaf-shaped arrowhead) and yet to be processed, but the material is likely to be of later Bronze Age date. In the rest of the area there seems to be no direct link between the known archaeological features and the distribution of material on the fields. There were small concentrations of material found over the Headlands enclosure and just north of the roman road. The analysis of the material will indicate if they are significant or not. AC explained that this is an unusual project as fieldwalking is usual used as a predictive tool, trying to find new sites in a little-known area.

Discussion.

GS commented that the concentration of later Bronze Age material may have been affected by the chalk quarry (dug in the 1970s for the purposes of construction of a new dairy which was not completed) and therefore may not represent an in situ deposit. This needs to be investigated.

PF mentioned that because of the scale of the maps, the transcription of the archaeological features from aerial photos is not that accurate (probably plus or minus 5 metres or so) so it will be difficult to try and match concentrations of finds to the features. There is also a Viking battle site of 1003 in this area, which needs to be considered in relation to the finds.

6. Update on proposed Henge excavations

Mike Pitts sent his apologies for not being at the meeting and had updated MPK on developments. Work is continuing on the development of a project design and Mick Rawlings from Wessex Archaeology is now doing this. Mike and Mick will be meeting with John Mann (engineer consultant who worked on the Cove earlier in the year) to finalise details for the proposals to erect stone 78.

Discussion

BE and PF stressed the importance of having a policy on reconstruction in the WHS in place as soon as possible. He and other members of the group expressed an interest in seeing copies of the English Heritage policy written by Chris Young. SS and MPK agreed to try and circulate copies.

It was agreed that the reconstruction policy and Mike's draft project design should be discussed at the next meeting in December.

7. Other current and forthcoming fieldwork

Negotiating Avebury Project

Dave Wheatley gave an update on progress. The team is currently in the second week of the excavations, which will be running until the end of September. This is the final fieldwork season of the five year project and the aims are twofold:

- To complete the investigations of the part of the West Kennet Avenue excavated last year. Nothing has been found so far, but a lot has been learned about the geology and the levels of archaeological preservation. There is a substantial amount of hillwash/colluvium in the area which is covering what was likely to have been a small natural sarsen field. The line of the Avenue would have passed through or around this. Some freshly-knapped flint has been discovered.
- To complete investigations of the Beckhampton Avenue in Longstones Field. Three trenches have been opened up by machine. One behind the Adam & Eve standing stones to check if the Avenue runs beyond here. So far nothing has shown up except a ditch feature. In the trench opened near to the Eve stone a stone burning pit is evident already. This could have potential for resolving the strategraphical relationship between the Avenue and the prehistoric enclosure excavated in previous years. Following several days of geophysical survey, a trench has been opened in the northeastern part of the field, near to Trusloe Cottages. Work has only just started here so it is unclear yet what features may be here.

All Cannings Cross Project

John Barrett and Dave McOmish briefly outlined the aims of this initial season of investigation and excavation on land at All Cannings Farm, near Devizes. The results of the first week of excavations have already transformed the understanding of this site and its development and preservation. The work will be continuing until the 19th of September.

The main aim is to characterise the area of known prehistoric settlement. There are substantial colluvial deposits over parts of the site which seem to date to the early and middle Bronze Age and pre-dates the Iron Age settlement deposits. The archaeological deposits have been eroded by ploughing in some

places, but in other places there is good preservation of features similar to those excavated by Cunnington in the 1920s. There are hints of industrial areas within the site.

The surviving deposits are substantial enough to warrant the development of a full project design for further seasons of fieldwork. The project has also involved looking at aerial photographs of the area and conducting fieldwalking survey. As a result a new contemporary site has been found near by (400 metres to the east) which also appear to have some kind of midden deposits. Pottery and bone have been found on the surface. The pottery appears to be similar to sherds found at the Headlands Iron Age enclosure at West Overton.

JB stressed the importance of community involvement and public access to the excavations. This will be an important feature of any future project.

Web site project

MPK mentioned that updates on these two excavation projects can be read on the Kennet District Council's web site, under the Avebury WHS project pages (www.kennet.gov.uk). An experimental "dig diary" project has been set up in conjunction with Wilts County Council's Window on Wiltshire's Heritage Project.

Aerial Reconnaissance

MB reported that the English Heritage Aerial Survey team are encouraging colleagues to let them know if they need new aerial photos taken. For example, recent photos have been taken of the arable areas within the WHS, which are being reverted to grassland.

MB explained that, with one or two exceptions, this summer was not a good one for aerial photography, even though it was a dry year. Photos were circulated of new enclosures found near Harestone Down. A new ring ditch has also been discovered opposite Silbury in a field boundary near the Swallowhead Spring. A detailed report of the new features found associated with the West Kennett Palisade Enclosures has now been published.

MPK enquired about the potential use of APs for monitoring the condition of monuments. MB replied that they are being used for monitoring the condition of Scheduled Monuments as standard now.

8. Update on appeal of Countryside Agency Mapping of Silbury Hill as open downland

BE gave an update on developments. The Countryside Agency has not backed down and an appeal by Lord Avebury is likely to go ahead. The appeal will probably be held locally and lots of documentation will be required. If the appeal is lost then English Heritage will have to deal with the problem of managing access to the Hill.

Members of the group who have already written to expressed supported were thanked. BE will keep people informed of developments by email.

SS mentioned that EH has been in discussion with English Nature about grazing sheep on Silbury as they want to improve the quality of the grass. EH think that goats may be better. There is a conflict here between the conservation of the archaeology and the grassland and DF expressed concern over the possible impact of grazing the monument.

9. Development Control & Utilities

Sue Farr reported on developments at West Kennett Manor. An evaluation was carried out a few months go on the area where a swimming pool is proposed. It was thought that the line of Palisade Enclosure 1 may run through the area. However, nothing was found. A watching brief will be carried out during the construction of the swimming pool.

10. Other Business

BE mentioned the consultation on the AONB management plan.

GS commented on the consultation documents circulation on the protection of the historic environment and on SMRs.

SS reported on a site visit she had made (following remarks made at the last meeting) to the eroded lay-by on the West Kennet Avenue. There are various options for trying to protect this area from further damage by vehicles. Temporary bollards or kerbs could be used or the area could be covered with soil and reseeded with grass. SS will talk to Amanda Chadburn and to the Highways department about who could fund the required work.

MB mentioned that crop circles are producing marks which appear again in subsequent years. This has been noticed on aerial photos taken in the Avebury area.

11. Next Meeting

Friday 5th December 10.30 in the Study Centre.

The meeting was followed by site visits to the archaeological excavations in Longstones Field and at All Cannings Cross.