

**Avebury World Heritage Site
Archaeological and Historical Research Group
DRAFT Notes of meeting 11th July 2009**

Present: Amanda Chadburn (Chair), Mike Allen, Bruce Eagles, Martyn Barber, Colin Shell, Brian Edwards, Paul Cripps, Sarah Simmonds, Gill Swanton, Nick Snashall, Vanessa Clarke, David Dawson, Jim Gunter, Heather Sabire

1. Apologies and Introductions

Sian Williams, Brian Davison, Andrew Fitzpatrick, Jonathan last, Kate Fielden, Matilda Webb, Nick Baxter, Melanie Pomeroy Kellinger, Nick Baxter,

2. Minutes and matters arising

2.1 Minutes

Draft notes from last minutes agreed.

2.2 Matters Arising

Stonehenge Visitor Centre

BE suggested that Stonehenge and Avebury seminar discussed at the last meeting be arranged before final decisions are made regarding the contents of the new visitor centre to allow its outcomes to inform interpretation.

AC reported that a memorandum of understanding had been signed between both Devizes and Salisbury museums with EH in relation to interpretation at the new visitor centre. She confirmed that Avebury will be mentioned as part of the wider context in the interpretation. She added that a potential increase in visitors as a result should be considered.

Flint Core Exhibit

CS suggested the 16kg flint core found during recent fieldwalking be exhibited in the Alexander Keiller (AK) museum. The group supported this idea. CS and BE added that it might also be exhibited in Devizes where it may draw a wider audience.

Action: NS to follow up exhibit of the flint with RC

Devizes and AK museum to look into creating an ongoing temporary exhibition space where such discoveries could be displayed.

Ridgeway Report

CS reported that PF has inked up the survey and once corrections have been made to the report it will be made available to the SMR. It is intended to publish the report. Plans at the appropriate scale will be provided to the Rights of Way manager at WC and a further meeting of the surface protection group held to negotiate the most appropriate maintenance strategy in light of the archaeological findings.

JG asked that the report be made available to the Friends of the Ridgeway to assist them in their campaigns including the adoption of a permanent TRO.

SS reported that there had been some concern expressed regarding parking on the Ridgeway during Solstice which appeared to extend to a greater extent than usual.

The National Trails office have inspected the Ridgeway and reported that no damage had occurred on this occasion due the extra parking. SS suggested that National Trails might be included in discussion of the arrangements for next year's Solstice via the Solstice Operational Planning group. The issue may be sensitive as vans have already been excluded from the car park at Avebury under the article 4 direction served by the former Kennet District Council. Excluding them from the Ridgeway might have a range of impacts which would need to be fully explored in the lead up to Solstice.

Action: SS to forward National Trails contact the NS and HM at the NT

3. WHS Steering Committee Representative's Report

3.1 NT CMP

Feedback on the CMP was taken at the Steering Committee meeting in May. CS enquired whether the NT CMP has been completed. He underlined the need for a Tree and Hedgerow Strategy to be drawn up. This requirement should be recorded in the CMP. He added that the use of the centre of the henge for hay should be examined as it restricted visitor access. NS pointed out that this impact was mitigated by cutting paths which had the benefit of allowing the direction of visitors for conservation.

CS expressed a desire to have had more opportunities to input into the production of the CMP. SS and NS explained that it was an internal NT document but had been presented to the Steering Committee for feedback on two occasions. On the second occasion written feedback had been invited. Verbal feedback had been reported to Atkins after the Steering Committee meeting in May. NS also pointed out that the final CMP would also be open for review in response to arising concerns, new discoveries, and changes in management context. SS suggested the need to articulate an approach to consultation and a method for response to comments explaining whether they have been incorporated.

Action: SS to report to the NT the desire expressed by some members of AAHRG to be more directly involved in the development of documents influential in the WHS.

3.2 A.K. Museum

SG reported that a review was underway to considering potential cuts in opening periods for the AK museum. General concern was expressed by the committee about this possibility.

NS added that the review had been suspended for the time being. The review should remain confidential

4. Monitoring of the Research Agenda - update

4.1 Comments on the Project Design

SS asked that all written comments on the project design be submitted by Monday 27th July.

The suggestions discussed at the meeting are noted below:

- Inclusion of a chapter heading on Palaeoenvironmental research needs
- Potential inclusion of a chapter outline
- 2 days suggested to revise the strategy is (18.1.6) is far too short especially for fully employed academics. There is also a certain level of contributor fatigue. Realistic timing would provide a more realistic timetable and greater in-kind contributions.
- Resource assessment should be carried out by the funded coordinated editor
- Museum collections should figure more prominently
- If Lidar used this could count as in-kind contribution.
- Mapping will need to incorporate the SMR, NMR and NMP. They have certain initiations. The SMR is 2 years out of date and there is currently no dedicated funding for the officer necessary to undertake this work. Work will need to be done as part of the update project to rectify this on the GIS mapping. The NMR is only updated from EH projects. It will need to be checked to see if it includes the most recent data. Research -led data is not always received.
- Further baseline records need to be considered including those held by the finds liaison officer.
- Time needs to be built into the timetable for contributors to write
- A sub-group of about 6 people should be identified as the Assurance and Project Board rather than the whole of AAHRG.
- Copyright should be the individual authors. This should not be allowed to limit public access however.
- WC should hold the GIS copyright. Attention needs to be given to legal obligation regarding OS copyright.
- The final draft of the project design should be circulated for information before it is submitted.

5. Current Archaeological & Historical Research

Cursory geoarchaeological exploration south of Rough Leaze

A small programme of geoarchaeological work was conducted in May 2009 in the field south of Rough Leaze (outside the south-east sector of Avebury). Excavations directed in Rough Leaze by Josh Pollard (University of Bristol) and assisted by Ros Cleal, Nicola Snashall (The National Trust) and David Robinson (Lancaster) 2007

recovered important Mesolithic and Neolithic activity preserved in tree hollows and also ephemeral stakehole features. Geoarchaeological work comprised a series of hand cored auger holes conducted immediately south-east of, and c. 10m from, the bank, and south of Rough Leaze in an area under long term pasture. Access was kindly granted by The National Trust and their tenant Farmer Mr Tony Farthing.

Aims

The aims of this limited one day field programme were simple and modest. Aims were to characterise the soils in the field south of Rough Leaze; establish the depth of former ploughsoil; attempt to locate any further tree throw hollows which might be of archaeological significance (though this would be a little bit of a needle-in-a-haystack job); and examine if any of the Avebury bank had eroded some 5-10m from the extant bank into the field and potentially preserved any buried soils. The work was conducted as a part of the University of Reading School of Continuing Education archaeology course (*Geoarchaeology in Action*) with 17 students lead by Mike Allen. Two augering programmes were conducted; i) a small 20m long transect running perpendicular to, and 10m from, the base of the bank into the field; and ii) a probabilistic auger survey in the field immediately south of the boundary to Rough Leaze. After a days augering a total of 13 hand auger holes to depths of up to 80cm were recorded and mapped.

Preliminary Results

The probabilistic survey clearly demonstrated the presence of a long term, but formerly ploughed, soil which survived to depths of 22cm on the slope and crest as a brown rendzina, but downslope was a slightly thicker, brown earth or colluvial brown earth. Although no treehollows or archaeological features were found, the thickness of soil indicates that any features that did survive would be subject to plough damage. In one location an odd chalk deposit was recovered – see below.

The 20m long transect cored six holes at 5m intervals and showed that there was no evidence of chalk eroding from the bank to the north-west, but it did record shallow colluvium to depths of 65cm at the base of the slope and edge of the field eroding from the south east. Here, therefore, was a narrow zone not much more than 15m wide of potentially better preservation. In one location at a depth of 29-40cm was layer of compacted chalk marl cementing many fine chalk pieces and containing a very small fleck of pottery. This overlay another 5cm of colluvium (hillwash) before reaching the chalk. Indeed during the probabilistic survey another almost identical layer was encountered at below 20cm the surface and directly overlying the chalk. These were both clearly not ‘natural’ deposits, nor were they in archaeological features; one lay on the chalk and the other within hillwash. Further judicious augering also indicated that their occurrence within the colluvium was highly localised and did not extend very far.

Calcareous cemented deposits

The calcareous cemented deposits are difficult to fully assess from a 4cm diameter hand auger – nevertheless they are clearly cultural layers, of cemented chalky marl with a number of fine chalky pieces, and contained submicroscopic piece of what

looked like pottery. They are akin to a chalky man-made surface and are preserved here because of the depth of hillwash and soil. Although this could be a made trackway or even date to the 1940s, the similarities in the matrix of the material and location just outside the henge is strongly reminiscent of the Neolithic hut floors found by Prof. Parker Pearson's team at Durrington Walls. Clearly it is unlikely that the Durrington 'houses' are alone – just that they have survived by being protected by hillwash, and bank material – just as at Avebury; layers survive due to the localised thicker colluvial soils. Houses such as those found at Durrington produced few features cut into the chalk, and thus one ploughing would destroy and remove them in other, more normal, contexts.

Implications

Without getting too excited about the evidence from just two 4cm diameter auger holes –the possibility that Neolithic houses lie within the vicinity of some of the great monuments is not just likely, but probably the norm. The survival of buildings such as those at Durrington Walls is largely dependent upon accretion of soil, deposits or archaeological material – a rarity in the chalk landscapes where long attrition by the plough is normal.

What next?

Although optimistically we might believe that we have potentially evidence for Neolithic buildings, we have no date, nor any context for the slim, but intriguing, evidence we have. Clearly some further field intervention is needed to establish the nature, and extent of these features. Where the fragile layer occurs on the slope, it lies at the base of the shallow soil and if allowed to be ploughed would be destroyed just as ploughing may have done so for features elsewhere in the Stonehenge area. Further, if we can establish that these are indeed houses, then what is the extent of them here? Are they present elsewhere round the Avebury monument, do they survive or are they present around Silbury, Marden, Mount Pleasant or other major Neolithic sites? Initial discussions are being undertaken to test these finds by limited excavation. Discussion currently centres on the size of intervention; being large enough to define what they are, while being as small as possible to minimise physical intrusion, especially if they prove to be of low archaeological significance. Initial discussion for a field programme is being conducted with Nicola Snashall and Joshua Pollard.

Possible long barrow and other discoveries in the Avebury area

MB reported that recent English Heritage aerial reconnaissance in the Avebury area has resulted in a number of interesting discoveries, the most significant of which are indications of Iron Age and/or Roman settlement to the north of Windmill Hill, and a possible Neolithic long barrow a short distance south east of the Avebury henge. The latter was captured as soilmarks, the barrow ditch showing clearly within the surrounding ploughsoil. In form, it resembles a class of long barrows known as the 'Cranborne Chase type', which feature a ditch which continues around one end of the mound. As with a number of examples of this type, the Avebury example also seems to feature a causeway across the ditch at the enclosed end. There is no

indication on the photography of a surviving mound, and available lidar imagery shows no trace of the monument.

Ongoing fieldwork at Damerham, Hampshire was briefly mentioned following erroneous press claims that the site was next to Stonehenge. The complex at Damerham features two Neolithic long barrows surviving as earthworks, two sizeable circular enclosures of probable late Neolithic date, around 30 ring ditches and much more. Details can be seen on the project website www.damerhamarchaeology.org.

6. Review of Current Opportunities for Dissemination of Research

The desirability of displaying the flint core at either museum was reiterated.

BE reported that he had established the costs for printing fascicules. Several hundred copies would result in a unit price of around £4 while print on demand might be as low as £3 per unit with an initial set up charge of around £500. NS suggested that the fascicules could sell for around £10 per copy.

MA added that another vehicle might be the new series of Research Papers produced by the Prehistoric Society and published by Oxbow. A series could be produced on the Avebury area.

7. Review of Membership

No items were raised.

8. Review of content of report to WHS Steering Committee

- AAHRG deeply regrets that the upkeep of the SMR is not sufficiently funded. This is particularly unfortunate when it covers a WHS. The failure to provide up to date information has a negative impact on many areas including the update of the Research Agenda, development control and the general management to the site including the production of the WHS management plan. The group urges the funding of an SMR officer within the Council to enable it to meet its statutory duty and obligations under PPG16. The SMR should be presented as standard GIS data and public access should be facilitated. All records should in due course be provided as a fully integrated HER.

9. Date of next meeting

Friday, 23rd October at 10.00 AM in Devizes Museum

10. Other research opportunities (i.e. utilities, development control issues)

Response to Planning Applications

SS reported that following a meeting with the County Archaeology office and Stonehenge Coordinator for EH it was decided that all parties would comment on setting where relevant in response to planning applications. It was suggested that if

an application threatens to have an impact a view shed analysis should be asked for from the applicant by the LPA. CS suggested that photomontage could be required and those holding data sets that might enable this such as the EA should be encouraged to allow their use. Data sets such as the lidar and terrain models could enable the building up of meaningful physical view shed envelopes. Access to these data sets and the establishment of a protocol for their use could provide a useful tool for planners. This would allow for a more detailed analysis than the current fairly limited view shed maps in the management plan. Proposals could be viewed within a topographic landscape. The interest and capacity of WC planners needs to be explored.

ACTION: CS to email Brad Fleet/Mike Wilmott to establish both interest in and capacity for employing technology within WC.

Chestnut Avenue

SS reported that she had received a consultation from the Forestry Commission regarding the felling of the chestnut avenue on the road to Swindon. She reported that in the absence of a woodland strategy members of AAHRG might like to comment on the advisability of replanting from an historic landscape perspective. Currently the NT has been asked to replant with lime but there may be some flexibility in requiring this. The FC is open to discussion with the NT and consideration of any suggestions from the group.

MA expressed concern over replanting on both visual and archaeological grounds although lime would be a more appropriate species if it is to take place. Other members shared this concern. SS suggested that a woodland strategy would be of great help in ensuring appropriate management of the site.

ACTION: SS to contact FC to suggest discussion with the NT and consideration of landscape and archaeological impact. NS to be copied in.

CS to suggest the need for a woodland strategy to the Steering Committee. Also suggestions for the adoption of appropriate article 4 directions as recommended in the WHS Planning Circular.

11. Final Review of the Report to WHS Steering Committee

In addition to the points noted in item 8 above the report will include the need for a woodland strategy and appropriate article 4 directions.

12. AOB

River Kennet

GS reported that the work to re-meander the Kennet will be taking place in August and that she will be undertaking the watching brief.

Neolithic Landscapes

MA reported that research is published in Land and People which indicates that Neolithic landscapes such as Avebury, Stonehenge and Cranbourne Chase has indicated that they may have been more open than is currently thought. Work is being done to revisit theories about the type and spatial distribution of woodland in the period.

Archaeological Symposium

DD reported that there will be at Devizes Town Hall on 14th November 2009 on Experimental Earthworks.

Reburial Consultation

The results are still under analysis and an outcome is expected in the autumn.