

Informal ASHRG Meeting

25 September 2020

10.30am

Zoom

Meeting called by: Gill Swanton (and other chairs)

Note taker: Susan Greaney

Attendees: Gill Swanton (GS), Amanda Chadburn (AC), Susan Greaney (SG), Richard Osgood (RO), Dan Miles (DM), Dave Field (DF), Matt Leivers (ML), Brian Edwards (BE), Jonathan Last (JL), Kate Fielden (KF), Colin Shell (CS), Vince Gaffney (VG), Mike Allen (MA), Ben Chan (BC), Steve Marshall (SM) and Bruce Eagles (BS)

Apologies: Josh Pollard (JP), Ros Cleal, Martyn Barber, Phil Harding, Tim Darvill, Katy Whitaker, Nick Baxter, Jude Currivan, Melanie Pomeroy-Kellinger, Sarah Askham (SA), Simon Crutchley, Ian Barnes, Alistair Barclay and Heather Sebire

Minutes

1) Welcome and introductions

GS welcomed everyone to the meeting, explained that it was an informal session to give everyone a chance to catch up while a formal meeting schedule can be arranged. This was because the 15th May 2020 meeting had been postponed by the secretariat because of Covid-19.

SG explained ground rules for using Zoom meeting and everyone introduced themselves.

2) Minutes and matters arising

GS explained that the minutes of the last meeting (Friday 10th January, 2020) would be formally approved at the next meeting but for everyone to review and send amends if needed.

AC noted that she had sent Sarah Simmonds an amend relating to the Woodhenge dating project

Apologies were read out. No matters arising were raised and the agenda for this meeting was agreed.

3) ASHRG administration

It was noted that several members may be missing out on communications due to changed e-mail addresses

CS noted that members are individuals, rather than representatives of organisations or institutions. He encouraged members to nominate research students or other researchers who would benefit from attending meetings.

Post-meeting note: AC notes that quite a few people on the list no longer work in relevant roles - e.g. Phil McMahon at HE has now been replaced by Helen Woodhouse, who should be invited to the group.

Seems to be some confusion over who are currently Chairs, although at the moment everyone agreed that the Chairs are GS, KW and RO.

Action: ALL to send any contact or staffing updates to SA.

Action: List of membership and Chairs to be confirmed at next formal meeting.

4) Covid-19 updates

SG states that English Heritage had furloughed up to 90% of its staff over the summer and had suffered a large loss of income due to sites being closed and loss of members. However, most staff

were now back at work even if on a part-time basis, and most EHT properties are back open to the public. Further news in November when results of revised four-year strategy for government funding are known.

AC informed everyone that no staff at Historic England had been furloughed, although many staff had been re-assigned to deal with Covid-19 critical guidance and funding administration. DM noted a positive from the crisis which has been the shift to training online with increased capacity for attendees.

RO noted that no MoD staff had been furloughed and all worked throughout.

ML stated that up to 50% of Wessex Archaeology fieldwork staff had been furloughed over the summer, but site work was mostly back to normal now, albeit with social distancing and restrictions of various kinds. Most office-based WA staff are working at home.

BC noted that none of the Living with Monuments project team have been furloughed, although the loss of the Easter and summer season of fieldwork has delayed the project, and that further funding was being applied for.

VG informed the group that laboratory and university access is limited, with the cores taken from Durrington for example, inaccessible at Lampeter.

BE and DF noted the lack of access to libraries, archives and museum stores which seems set to continue for some considerable period. BE noted that Wilts Museum was back open but the library was not yet. He did note that Market Lavington museum was setting a great example of regular blog posts: <https://marketlavingtonmuseum.wordpress.com/>

CS noted that university labs not yet accessible to researchers at Cambridge (e.g. Duckworth Collection).

5) Staff changes

The group wished to record its thanks to Sarah Simmonds for all her work supporting this group and within the wider World Heritage Site. CS noted that interviews for her replacement are currently taking place, although restricted to internal candidates presently.

Mark Bowden retired from Historic England on 18th September but it is hoped he will want to stay a member of this group.

Action: DM to ask him

CS noted the proposed changes to National Trust staff, which have an impact on the Alexander Keiller Museum Curator. The Curator is currently on furlough and the post is at risk. Staff find out the result of the redundancy consultation in the first week of October. He noted that a recent SALON newsletter contained some information about the proposed cuts (<https://us6.campaign-archive.com/?u=5557bc147d34993782f185bde&id=9fed9c67a8>)

AC noted that the AK Museum Board has not met since the Covid-19 crisis began and had not been consulted on the furlough/ proposed redundancy of the Curator's post.

SG noted that EHT were also not consulted on the proposed staff changes but had made representations to the consultation due to the collection there mostly being in guardianship and subject to a local management agreement.

KF questioned if the NT were the right people to look after this collection if they cannot provide staff to look after and provide access to it. DM agreed that access to collections fundamentally important. KF asked if EHT should consider taking the collection back? CS noted that some of the collection belongs to the NT (from their land, post-Keiller). BC noted that collections from Living with Monuments work would be deposited there.

6) Research and fieldwork updates

Living with Monuments Project

BC provided an update on progress with this project, with a week-long socially distanced excavation taking place on Folly Hill (between Avebury Trusloe and Beckhampton roundabout) last week. He described the strategy and the results to the group.

A written update was sent by JP:

'This was part of the Living with Monuments Project. Fieldwork has been severely impacted this year, however we were able to run five days of limited excavation on a flint scatter adjacent to the Folly Hill barrow cemetery between 14th-18th September, with a largely volunteer crew (some were, of course, press-ganged). We dug three 5x5m trenches, each divided into metre squares for recovery of lithics from the former ploughsoil. Worked flint densities were in the order of 10-30 pieces per metre square. On technological grounds, the material looks to run from the Early Neolithic (a few late Mesolithic pieces may be present) through to the EBA. Some of it was in surprisingly fresh condition. We anticipated it would be related to settlement activity, but no tools were found. Primary flakes were well represented. We also encountered out-cropping flint nodules within the chalk. It's likely that this is a long-lived area of flint procurement and working, but without the kind of focus found, for example, on Knoll Down. This is significant, in that it highlights a developing pattern of Neolithic settlement absence in the zone west of the Winterbourne and south of the brook running along the foot of Windmill Hill. It is in stark contrast to the situation in the dry valley east of Waden Hill, and along Avebury and Overton Downs. It feeds into a picture of long-term structuring of activity across the heart of the landscape. We also encountered stake-holes, far too many stake-holes, in fact 176 of them in one 5x5m trench... One linear (or slightly curved?) concentration must represent a repeatedly reinstated fence line or enclosure. Probably prehistoric, perhaps MBA, LBA, IA???'

MA informed the group that he and Charly French had augered the slope-side and valley bottom deposits to the south and east, again showing remarkably little hillwash/colluvium in the valley floor (2.5m of which the base is prehistoric). No long sediment captures seem to exist in the landscape – the only way to find them is to look under early Neolithic monuments such as long barrows.

Durrington pits

VG highlighted that the research on the surveys and augering of the Durrington pits had been published, but that further research work (DNA extraction) will continue on the cores as soon as Covid-19 restrictions allow. They are potentially looking at more survey work in the area.

CS noted that the extra information in the response to the Secretary of State (largely written by Paul Garwood) was useful, and thought that the distribution of pits did suggest human influence but that the circuit needs to be understood more fully.

VG thinks they are not solution hollows, but a significance structure that is important for understanding the relationship between monuments in that landscape.

SG's published paper on shafts in the Cranborne Chase landscape was mentioned.

Action: SG to circulate to those who requested to see it.

ML noted that the work at the MoD headquarters land and at Larkhill showed a mixture of artificial and natural shafts and thinks that they are a mixture. The assessment report for the army rebasing area is still with the client for approval and is not yet publicly available.

Action: ML will circulate this report when he can.

Army rebasing project (post-meeting update from ML)

'There will be a short note on one particular aspect of the Larkhill causewayed enclosure and some later features associated with it appearing in the next issue of PAST, and then a fuller discussion of the same evidence later, hopefully in the Journal of Skyscape Archaeology. These two collaborations between Clive Ruggles, Amanda Chadburn and myself.

Bob Davis, Phil Harding and myself have carried out RTI recording of the chalk plaque fragment from the Army Basing Programme site at Bulford, alongside which we also examined the plaque from Butterfield Down and the two plaques from the Chalk Plaque Pit. We've just finished the resulting paper, which we will be submitting for publication any time now.

I have a paper summarising the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age results of the whole Army Basing Programme set of sites in the context of the development of the Stonehenge landscape, which is currently undergoing peer review and which will (hopefully) appear in Internet Archaeology before too long.'

Sarsen origins research

DF noted with interest the results of the sarsen origins paper and implications for West Woods.

SG noted that further research on the core from Stone 58 was forthcoming

DF questioned why more portable XRF work wasn't done on the North Wessex Downs, to the west or east of the other samples e.g. from near West Kennet, the Wansdyke and Savernake Forrest, or on sarsens on Salisbury Plain (e.g. Imber, Chitterne).

SG responded that she knew some further work had been done on e.g. the Cuckoo Stone and the Tor Stone at Bulford but did not know the results. She re-iterated that this is just the start of the research!

SM noted the colour differences of the sarsens at Stonehenge – how could this be explained? And asked if the project could expand to Avebury. GS offered potential sarsens on her land for sampling.

Action: Invite David Nash along to a future ASHRG to present on the research progress (with TD and KW) so that the group's questions can be answered.

Woodhenge

AC noted that her radiocarbon dating project had been delayed by Covid-19 but that she and Clive Ruggles had been carrying out fieldwork at Woodhenge and the vicinity recently, as part of the work preparing a book on the astronomical monuments of the Stonehenge WHS, which will be published in 2020-1 by Liverpool University Press on behalf of Historic England.

7) Planning/development

KF noted that a large new house had been given planning permission to be built at Avebury Trusloe which is unfortunate for the WHS. She also noted that the decision on the A303 tunnel was due on 13th November.

KF also drew everyone's attention to the two current consultations on changes to planning laws –

- 1) Changes to current planning system, prior to implementation of new White Paper (see 2), deadline for responses/comments is **1st October**
<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/changes-to-the-current-planning-system>
- 2) Planning for the future white paper, major changes to planning system, deadline for responses/comments is 29th October
<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/planning-for-the-future>

KF noted that the new white paper doesn't even mention archaeology and that the extension of 'permission in principle' was worrying as it would allow large-scale developments to proceed without archaeological evaluation.

Action: ALL to review and respond to planning consultations if possible

8) Future events, conferences and fieldwork

BE mentioned a forthcoming exhibition at Wiltshire Museum on 'Ways of Seeing Wiltshire' and that he is curating an online exhibition relating to cricket – watch this space!

DM said that he may have some support to put the WHS research framework online on the research frameworks web platform this Autumn/Winter - he will send around the plan to do this - and he will get in touch with a few people who volunteered to have a role in how this can be done. But it is a good opportunity. More details to come.

Action: DM to send round plan for hosting research framework online

CS noted that revision of the research framework will be needed soon and should perhaps be done in co-ordination with the South West Research Framework. He also noted some interesting events relating to tree-planting campaigns run by the AHRC that he could forward to anyone interested.

9) AOB

CS stated on WHS management that the project board was looking at long-term funding, possibly with Wiltshire Council continuing to run the unit but with a separate fundraising arm, possibly a charity with trustees. Governance changes review starts in January 2020 with initial results expected in July. Steering committees have to be consulted.

AC noted that as Wiltshire Council cannot use Zoom, that Microsoft Teams should be used for the next formal meeting. CS agreed that their access should take priority. Next meeting date to be confirmed.

Action: ALL to send agenda items to SA/GS for next meeting.