

HISTORY OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL DISCOVERY IN THE CRANBORNE CHASE AND WEST WILTSHIRE DOWNS AONB

Introduction

The history of interest in the archaeology in the AONB is important for two reasons. Firstly the known sites, and features across the landscape are a product of past survey, investigation and research. Their distribution is partly dependent on where people have focused their attention. Understanding the areas of the landscape that have been particularly focused on, the methods that have been used and the questions that have been asked, help us to identify areas, techniques and questions which have been neglected.

Secondly the landscape of the AONB, especially centred on the heartland of Cranborne Chase played a major role in the development of the discipline of archaeology. The history of investigation of the landscape by figures such as Stukeley, Aubrey, Colt Hoare, Pitt Rivers and Sumner played an important role in the development of modern archaeology. The legacy of their investigations is as an important feature of the heritage of the AONB as the sites that they investigated.

Sites such as South Lodge or Woodcutts are not therefore just valuable for what they tell us about the Bronze or Iron Age but as key foci in the landscape which represent how the way we look at the past has developed.

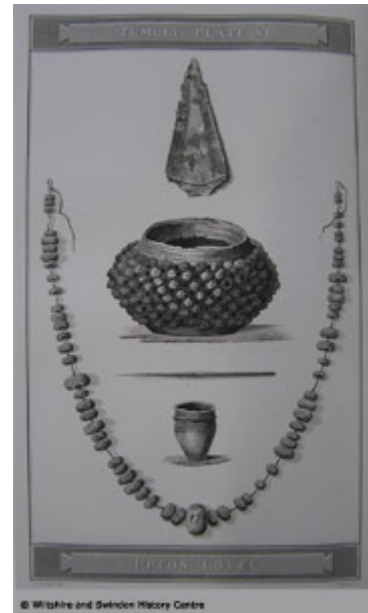
This important legacy has led more recent generations of archaeologists to investigate the landscape of the chase and added to its reputation particularly for the wealth of prehistoric archaeology present.

Antiquarian Activity in the AONB and the origins of the systematic investigation of its heritage

In England in the 15th and 16th century there was an increasing interest in the curiosities of the past and a rising awareness that the past had been materially different from the present.

This rising awareness is represented by William Camden's *Britannia* (1586) the first comprehensive topographic survey of England. His descriptions of the topography of Dorset and Wiltshire include descriptions of the prehistoric archaeology of the AONB.

“Willy [Wylye], a Village some miles distant: over against it a very large warlike fence or hold, and the same fortified with a deepe and duple Ditch. The neighbour-



*Plate from Ancient Wiltshire
by Colt Hoare
(Reproduced with permission
from Wiltshire and Swindon
History Centre)*

dwellers call it Yanesburie [Yarnsbury] Castle, And by the forme and maner of making, a man may easily know it was a Romane Campe”¹ William Camden 1586

The most famous of the 17th century antiquarians was John Aubrey (1626-1697). He worked primarily in Wiltshire and produced a ‘Natural History of Wiltshire’ which as well as describing such miscellany as ‘Springs Medicinal’, and ‘Reptiles and Insects’ also includes a section on ‘Architecture’ which includes prehistoric sites, and ruins alongside stately homes.

“Wardour Castle, the seate of the Lord Arundell, was kept by Col Ludlow: a part of it was blown up by Sir F. Dodington in 1644 or 1645. Here was a red-deer parke and a fallow-deer parke.” John Aubrey (first published 1847)



*William Stukeley
(Reproduced with permission from Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre)*

It was during the eighteenth century that antiquarians such as William Stukeley (1687-1765) began to recognise that there had been a lengthy pre-roman occupation of the British Isles and began to try to ascertain relative dates for archaeological sites which had no historical record.

It was Stukeley who first noted that the Roman Road called the Ackling Dyke in the AONB cut through one of the disc barrows of the Bronze Age cemetery on Oakley Down.



*William Cunnington
(Reproduced with permission from Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre)*

Antiquarianism continued to develop in the late 18th century with a growing emphasis on excavation and some of the best work was undertaken by William Cunnington (1754-1810) and his patron Richard Colt Hoare who lived at Stourhead in Wiltshire. They excavated many sites in Southern Wiltshire and some in Dorset including 379 barrows systematically recording their findings and using stratigraphy to distinguish between primary and secondary burials.

Any history of archaeological investigation in the AONB needs to place considerable emphasis on the work and legacy of General Augustus Lane-Fox Pitt Rivers (1827-1900) who after inheriting the estate at Rushmore undertook slow and extensive excavations on sites within the estate and surrounding area. Pitt Rivers was interested in understanding the history of each site, carefully recording stratigraphy and the position of finds. Pitt Rivers also stressed the importance of publishing a complete record of his work, producing beautifully illustrated reports. Pitt Rivers is seen by many as a central figure in the development of archaeology, and even as the

¹ The full translated text of Camden’s Britannia is available from <http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/travellers/index.jsp> [last accessed September 2009].

father of scientific archaeology. His position as the first Inspector of Ancient Monuments following the passing of the Ancient Monuments act of 1882 is also highly significant.

But as Bowden points out in his comprehensive biography of the general:

“However, if for no other reason, the General has had a significant influence on British Archaeology as the excavator of over forty sites including such classics as Wor Barrow, South Lodge Camp and Woodcutts, all of which have been sources of reference and reinterpretation for later researchers”. (1991: 1)



Pitt Rivers also has a central role in the development of anthropology and ethnography, as represented by the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford. He was also an early exponent of the role of archaeology in public education as demonstrated by his pleasure grounds at the Larmer Tree and museum at Farnham. The museum was finally closed in 1966 and the archaeological collections transferred to Salisbury Museum in 1975.

*Pitt Rivers
(Reproduced with permission from Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre)*

Following Pitt Rivers death there was a general decline in standards in archaeological excavation and fieldwork. A major exception to this however was Heywood Sumner, a devoted follower of the General who also focused his activities on the Cranborne Chase.



*Plate from book on Cranborne Chase by Heywood Sumner
(Reproduced with permission from Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre)*

Other investigations by amateur archaeologists during the first half of the 20th century were variable in quality. These range from excavations of the Roman Temple on Whitesheet Hill by Nan Kevill in 1925, 1926 which recorded no information of stratigraphy, features or the locations of the spectacular finds to much more systematic excavations undertaken by R C Clay of the Iron Age settlements of the Cranborne Chase during the same period.

Changing trends during the 20th century

One major trend of archaeological investigation within the AONB in the 19th and early 20th century was the focus on the prehistoric archaeology of the area. There are however exceptions to this trend Pitt Rivers study of the medieval King John's House in Tollard Royal, investigation of the Winkelbury Anglo-Saxon cemetery and the large scale excavation of the Rockbourne or 'West Park' Roman Villa from 1942 onwards being just three.

The last 30 years has also seen an increase in new methods and scales of investigation ranging from geophysics, landscape scale surveys including aerial survey, and systematic recording of historic buildings. The interest of archaeologists has also expanded to include evidence from modern periods linked with a much wider definition of the historic environment and heritage conservation. For example, the study, conservation and management of historic parks and gardens now fall firmly within the archaeologist's agenda.



Excavations at Down Farm

Another trend is a gradual shift from the investigation of sites by privately funded amateurs to research projects supported by both universities and other professional bodies, and local and county based societies.

Finally the rise of developer funded 'professional archaeology' instigated by Planning Policy Guidance 16 in 1990 which had its origins in the state funded rescue excavations of the 1970s and 1980s has had some impact on the history of archaeology enquiry in the AONB. This has included investigations preceding the laying of a pipeline in the northern half of the AONB by Wessex Archaeology in 1989 and small scale watching briefs and investigation in advance of small scale extraction.

However the impact of PPG16 in aiding our understanding of the heritage of the AONB is not as important as other areas of England. This is because since the designation of the AONB in 1981 large scale development has been restricted through planning regulations. There is not therefore the extensive 'grey' literature that exists in other areas of the country documenting numerous surveys, watching briefs and excavations by professional archaeological units in advance of road widening, gravel extraction, large scale housing developments and the like.

University research projects in the AONB

From the mid 1970s onwards a series of large scale research projects have been instigated by individuals affiliated to universities.

The first project, led by Richard Bradley, John Barrett and Martin Green, initially focused on excavations of the Bronze Age site at south Lodge Camp before widening its scope to look at the social development of monuments and landscape of the Cranborne Chase from the Neolithic to the Iron Age. (Barrett et.al. 1991a; 1991b)

Martin Green has continued his investigation of the prehistoric and historic landscape surrounding his farm, and continues to conduct regular fieldwalking, survey and excavations (Green 2000).

Charly French, Mike Allen and Helen Lewis undertook a palaeo-environmental and archaeological investigation of the upper Allen Valley of Cranborne Chase, Dorset, between 1998 and 2003. This involved a programme of valley-



Excavations at Down Farm

wide geoarchaeological survey and palynological analyses of the relict palaeo-channel system, along with sample investigations and open area excavations of a variety of prehistoric sites in the area (French et.al. 2007)

Bournemouth University, led by John Gale, have undertaken a programme of excavation at the Neolithic Henges at Knowlton and a group of Bronze Age Barrows at High Lea Farm, Hinton Martell (Gale 1996, 2005, 2006)

The most recently instigated research project 'The Damerham Archaeology Project' has stemmed from the discovery of two previously unknown Neolithic Long Barrows and other prehistoric features in the Parish of Damerham. It is a community archaeology project currently using geophysical survey to better characterise the monuments, but hopes to undertake fieldwalking and potentially targeted excavations in subsequent seasons. More details can be found at www.damerhamarchaeology.org [last accessed September 2009].

The ongoing Cranborne Prehistoric Landscape Project concentrates on detailed palaeoenvironmental sampling of Neolithic and Bronze Age monuments in the Down Farm environs, and focuses on aspects of the development land use (Allen 1998). This builds on all of the projects detailed above.

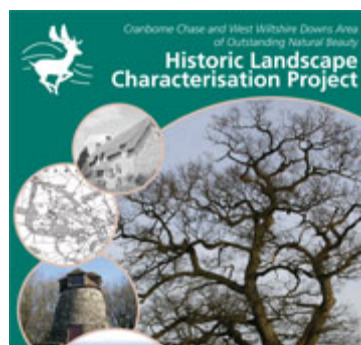
Large Scale Modern Surveys of the AONB Landscape

As mentioned above interpretation of archaeological evidence captured on aerial photographs is one of the ways that is used to locate new archaeological sites and characterise the historic environment

This method was undertaken in a systematic way for the landscape centred on Bokerley Dyke by the Royal Commission for Historic Monuments (now subsumed by English Heritage) (Bowen 1990)

However the AONB has yet to be covered by the National Mapping Programme.

More recently English Heritage has promoted a programme of Historic Landscape Characterisation which studies the historic development of the modern day landscape. The AONB undertook a programme of Historic Landscape Characterisation between January 2007 and July 2008. Details can be found at www.historiclandscape.co.uk (Rouse 2008)



The role of 'amateur' societies and groups

'Amateur' Societies and Groups play an important role in the ongoing research of the archaeology and heritage of the AONB. These range from active field clubs linked to county societies to local societies and groups based within parishes and museums. These are only 'amateur' in the sense that their members are unpaid and do not necessarily have professional archaeological qualifications. They are however professional in the quality of the fieldwork and research they undertake, and often act as 'local' repositories of detailed knowledge, and expertise.

Currently active societies include:

The Archaeological Field Group of the Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society which this year undertook excavations in Donhead St Mary (see <http://www.wiltshireheritage.org.uk/society> [last accessed September 2009]).

The Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society which are currently undertaking 'The Dorset County Boundary Survey' (<http://www.dorsetcountymuseum.org/research/countyboundary.html> [last accessed September 2009]).

East Dorset Antiquarian Society which have been undertaking excavations in recent years focusing particularly on the Allen Valley (See <http://www.dorset-archaeology.org.uk/> [last accessed September 2009])

Wiltshire Buildings Record, who are about to embark on a programme of survey of historical farm buildings. (See <http://www.wshc.eu/about-wshc/buildings-record.html> [last accessed September 2009])

There are many other societies active in historical and genealogical research whose activities may also overlap with the field of archaeology and the management of the historic environment such as the county based Family History Societies.

Within the AONB there are many societies and groups ranging from village historical societies to Women's Institutes groups, with an active interest in the archaeology and history of the area. Many of these host guest speakers and go on fieldtrips but do not currently engage in fieldwork or research as a group, although of course individual members may be undertaking research.



Community Archaeology Project at Damerham

Many of these groups also run or have been central in instigating local archives of photographs, documents and research into the history of the area.

These include:

Fovant Historical Archives administered by the Fovant Historical Interest Group (<http://www.fovanthistory.org/> [last accessed September 2009]).

Tisbury Archives administered by the Tisbury Local History Society. (<http://www.users.waitrose.com/~tisburyhistory/> [last accessed September 2009]).

Some societies are active in the management of archaeological features including the Fovant Badges association (<http://www.fovantbadges.com/> [last accessed September 2009])

Further Reading

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