The Prehistoric Society

No. 107
Summer 2024

PAST

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE PREHISTORIC SOCIETY

New work on tracing the rock origin of Group XX stone axe-heads

The East Midlands is often overlooked as a Neolithic stone axe-head producing area in favour of well-known manufacturing regions such as the Lake District (Group VI – Great Langdale volcanic tuffs), Cornwall (Groups I, II, III, IV, XVI & XVII – metagabbroic rocks), and Sussex (flint). Yet it is in the Midlands where F.W. Shotton in 1959 suggested the source of the Group XX axes would be found, specifically at Spring Hill (SK 450158), just east of Whitwick within the Charnwood Forest.

Charnwood Forest covers some 65 square kilometres to the north-west of Leicester and east of Coalville. The geology sees 247-237 Ma Triassic Mercia Mudstones unconformably lying on much older 635 -541 Ma Ediacaran rocks that outcrop, sometimes dramatically, at certain locations within the area.

Epidotised tuffaceous sandstones within the Ediacaran succession are believed to have provided the raw material for the 134 stone artefacts assigned to this petrological group. In association with the University of Leicester, we have so far visited and taken portable x-ray fluorescence (or pXRF) readings of 14 of the 18 Ediacaran exposures currently planned for analysis, in order that we can compare them with readings from stone axe-heads. Early data comparisons suggest the areas around Windmill Hill (west of Woodhouse Eaves) and Hangingstone Hills (Charnwood Forest Golf Club) have the closest elemental matches to an artefact 'fingerprint'. Sadly, Shotton's suggested location at Spring Hill has been quarried away, however outcrops of the same rock type can be found close by, and these are the target of the final stages of fieldwork currently being carried out.

Left: Hangingstone Hills outcrop at Charnwood Forest Golf Club

Below: pXRF on an outcrop near Woodhouse Eaves

Group XX axehead from Goadby Marwood (Mik Markham and Leicester Museums Service)

pXRF is an established and quick, non-destructive means of measuring the elemental compositions of rocks. By comparing elemental analyses from artefact and outcrop, we hope to determine the actual outcrop(s) that provided the raw material for the artefacts, or at least come close, in order to allow further investigative archaeological work. To date, pXRF analyses of a total of 23 artefacts held by Cambridge, Leicestershire, Lincoln, and Sheffield Museums have allowed us to determine a recognisable elemental 'fingerprint' for Group XX and confirm that three artefacts currently listed as Group XX fall well outside the expected ranges and need reassigning.

Concurrently, photography of artefacts has confirmed that there are two distinct morphological groups, with one group of axe-heads longer than the other. This may indicate that workshops are involved rather than simple ad-hoc rock extraction and manufacture; indeed, each group could potentially have come from a separate workshop. This also aids with visual categorisation that complements the pXRF data and original petrographic thin sections and helps to initially distinguish Group XX axe-head types from those of similar tuff material such as those from Cumbria.

Group XX is not a large group, but axe-heads of this material have been transported north into the Peak District and southwards, particularly to the Fens. We suspect that the relative scarcity from the immediate environs may be to do with the widespread cover of medieval ridge and furrow and with modern cultivation. Other examples may come to light.

Jonny Graham (jag62@leicester.ac.uk), University of Leicester, Mik Markham and David Field, both independent

Prehistoric or medieval? Excavation of an enigmatic monument in the Lake District

Approximately 120 monuments of an unfamiliar kind have been recognised in the central Lake District. The first examples were discovered by the late Peter Rogers, and more are still being identified. Some have been recorded in detail by Peter Style and Aaron Watson, yet the structures described as 'boulder monuments' remain too little known. Most are situated on high ground. They have been found on the same sites as Early Bronze Age monuments, and for that reason, it has always seemed likely that they would date from a well-documented period of expansion into the uplands of Cumbria. Until now, there had been no direct evidence of their age, and at one time, they were dismissed as the remains of recent shelters or sheepfolds.

These questions were addressed by excavating a typical example on the shallowly sloping side of the pass at Dunmail Raise, between Grasmere and Thirlmere (NGR NY 33276 51125). The site was similar to many others and was selected in consultation with Peter Rogers, Peter Style and Aaron Watson. It was not among the best-preserved examples, but it did have the advantage that it was considerably more accessible. It was located near an enormous round cairn comparable with Early Bronze Age monuments in northern England. Over the course of two weeks, it was possible to investigate it completely.

The project had three aims: to establish its authenticity as a distinctive kind of monument, to investigate its construction in more detail than was possible from surface evidence, and to look for dating evidence.

What might have been mistaken for a random accumulation of boulders turned out to be a carefully constructed monument. It consisted of an approximately penannular enclosure 4 m in external diameter built against the east face of a substantial erratic boulder 2 m high. This enclosure was bounded by a drystone wall with a maximum width of 1.5 m, which had a clearly defined outer face and a less regular inner face. It had been entered through a narrow gap facing the glacial boulder and the mountainside behind it.

The monument was constructed using immediately available material that natural processes had moved downhill from substantial screes on the high ground to the west. Similar material can be found in local streams. Some of this rubble came to rest against the uphill side of the boulder where

Above: The boulder monument on Dunmail Raise before excavation (Image: Aaron Watson)

Right: The boulder monument on Dunmail Raise during excavation, showing its wider setting (Image: Aaron Watson)

there was no evidence of any ancient structure. More had been swept down the mountain on either side of the stone. The construction of the monument involved the deliberate rearrangement of this material. The character of the perimeter wall varied at different points around its circuit. To the north, where erosion had created a slight natural gully, it was built in two courses and included smaller rocks, but to the south, where the topography was more even, there was only one. It was up to 70 cm high. The entrance was flanked by unusually large, rounded boulders, and a flat rock already embedded in the subsoil provided a ready-made 'threshold'. When the monument was newly built it would stand out because the wall contained so many red stones.

The interior of the enclosure was entirely empty. It was excavated completely, but there was no trace of a buried soil. Nor were there any pits, post holes or graves like those associated with local ring cairns. There was nothing to indicate the function of this structure. After the enclosure had been built, its interior was filled with smaller angular and rounded stones to create a level platform. A deposit of tightly packed rubble built up against the wall; it is not clear whether there was a significant interval between these events. The interior was filled in an orderly manner, starting with the deposition of roughly square boulders against the inner face of the wall. Although this platform included a few flat stones, there were no signs of any deliberate paving. The most conspicuous feature of the site was not the rubble platform but the glacial boulder which could have been recognised from a distance. Beneath the rubble platform there was a single flint flake, which had been burnt, and a chip of worked quartz.

Three charcoal samples, all of alder, were sealed by the stones filling the interior of the monument. They came from separate contexts beneath the platform and were directly sealed by it. We had expected them to date from the second millennium BC, so the actual dates came as a complete surprise. At 95.4% probability they were: AD 666–820, AD 689–882, and AD 637–774 (SUERC 107532–4). There is no reason to suppose that any of these samples were intrusive, and the presence of two lithic artefacts may not be relevant as there was a *bona fide* Bronze Age cairn not far away.

Left: The monument on the completion of excavation. Right: Photogrammetric image of the monument after excavation. (Images: Aaron Watson)

The outcome of this work poses a problem. There seems no doubt that this 'boulder monument' dates from the early medieval period when settlement extended into the high ground of the Lake District, as it did during the Bronze Age, but the results of this work cannot be extrapolated to other sites without further fieldwork. Superficially similar structures may have been established at very different times. Alternatively, the results of our work on Dunmail Raise may have wider implications.

Prehistoric or medieval? Prehistoric *and* medieval? Only time will tell. We plan further fieldwork to find out.

Acknowledgements
The work was carried out by Richard Bradley, Ronnie Scott, Peter Style, and Aaron Watson and took place with the permission of the landowner, the Lowther Estate. We are grateful to David Bliss for making this possible and to Eleanor Kingston for her encouragement and good advice. We must thank Rachel Ballantyne for identifying the charcoal samples and for advising on their suitability for dating.

Richard Bradley (richardjbradley4@gmail.com), University of Reading, Peter Style, independent and Aaron Watson, Kilmartin Museum

Cults of the head? Exploring the Dean Hall temple carvings

In south-west Gloucestershire, near the village of Littledean, lie the remains of Dean Hall Roman temple. The site sits just below the crest of a hill overlooking a large oxbow of the River Severn, commanding spectacular views of the Severn Bore, a periodic tidal surge up to 2.8 m high, that can be heard for miles around. First discovered in 1984, initial excavations at the temple led by Professor Barri Jones revealed the heavily robbed multi-phase stone remains dating to the second and third centuries AD. Subsequent work by local volunteer archaeologists between 2016 and 2023 revealed that the temple overlay later prehistoric deposits, including a Middle Bronze Age cemetery and features likely to date to the Late Iron Age, all of which seem to focus around a natural spring.

By far the most dramatic discovery on the site, however, comprises an assemblage of over 100 carved stone heads; a corpus which is unique in a British context and unparalleled elsewhere in Europe. The first head was discovered in 2017, during the processing of bulk soil samples from the 1985 excavation. Since then, numerous others have been excavated from secondary contexts in the fills of ditches, gullys, pits, and pools associated with the water management at the Roman temple. No head is complete, though some survive better than others.

The heads are clearly not of the Classical Roman style, nor do they seem to focus on Roman subjects. The depictions vary from those of Late Iron Age (La Tène) style, to those which belong broadly within a Romano-British tradition. Other heads do not appear to conform to either style. Size and preparation of the stone also varies, from purposefully worked flat slabs that could have been inserted into walls,

Aerial photograph of Dean Hall Roman Temple, taken by R. Ellis-Haken © 'Cults of the Head?' Project CC-BY-4.0

Portraits of three different styles of head found at Dean Hall Roman Temple a) Head 32 in Late Iron Age (La Tène) style; b) Head 120, broadly within a Romano-British tradition; c) Head 27, not conforming to either style. Taken by R. Ellis-Haken © 'Cults of the Head?' Project CC-BY-4.0

Portraits and profiles of three different styles of head, with different types of stone preparation a) Head 32 from a purposefully worked flat slab; b) Head 120 in three dimensions; c) Head 4, a small disc; taken by R. Ellis-Haken © 'Cults of the Head?' Project CC-BY-4.0

to those which depict a head in three dimensions, to small discs that could be held in the hand. Rare examples of other, non-human imagery include possible serpentine, porcine and avian heads.

The representation of human body parts in metal, wood or stone is not unusual on Roman religious sites in Europe. At Dean Hall, however, there is a distinct lack of variation in the types of body parts represented, with a seemingly universal focus on the head, recalling the depiction of human heads in metalwork and other media by Late Iron Age communities across Europe. Though some of the Dean Hall heads exhibit characteristics familiar from Late Iron Age metalwork, such as lentoid eyes and wedge-shaped noses, others do not, suggesting perhaps a broader chronology, and/or the participation of individuals or communities unfamiliar with the conventions of La Tène art.

Head 22; a possible serpent head; taken by R. Ellis-Haken © 'Cults of the Head?' Project CC-BY-4.0

The Dean Hall assemblage challenges how we as researchers classify and catalogue art that does not conform straightforwardly to 'Iron Age' or 'Roman' styles, but instead represents a multi-faceted hybrid made up of influences from both. Some aspects of the material appear to diverge entirely from the artistic conventions of the period, presenting a further interpretative challenge.

Over the next year, the Cults of the Head Project aims to analyse the stylistic, contextual and geological origins of the Dean Hall assemblage, and to explore its significance within the context of north-west European Late Iron Age / Roman period visual culture. As part of this we will create a comprehensive and accessible textual and 3D visual record to be hosted by the Archaeological Data Service (ADS). Project updates can be followed on 'X' (formally Twitter) @ CultoftheHeads.

Acknowledgements
The Cults of the Head Project at the University of York is funded by the Leverhulme Trust. The authors would also like to thank Colleen Morgan, Richard Hagan and Don Macer-Wright for their help with various aspects of the project.

Rebecca Ellis-Haken (reb.ellis-haken@york.ac.uk) and Ian Armit, both University of York

Formalised pathways and structured movement in a ceremonial landscape: the prehistoric avenues of Britain of the third and second millennia BC

The class of linear monuments known as avenues has been understudied in recent years, particularly in relation to their landscape settings and orientations. As part of a PhD project, a fresh definition of the prehistoric avenue is proposed. Using this, the diverse characteristics of these 'pathways' will be considered in the context of prehistoric time and space by exploiting a multidisciplinary and multi-method research design. This may shed new light on their purpose and use.

The study's objectives can be summarised as follows:

a) To create a database and gazetteer of known and probable examples, documenting their archaeology, context, and form, and mapping their distribution across Britain.

b) To deploy statistical tools to analyse the extent and density of these sites, including their orientation and the statistical relevance of any relationships within the wider ceremonial and settlement landscape and any relationships to nearby hydrological features such as rivers, streams, or springs.

c) To study each avenue in its landscape setting and to investigate any links in the orientation of the avenue to solar, lunar or other cosmological events through 3D landscape reconstruction and skyscape software.

Some of the enclosures of prehistoric Britain first described in the 16th and 17th centuries by antiquaries such as William Camden and John Aubrey were believed to be the sites of ritual or ceremonial activities and appeared to have their approaches and entrances monumentalised by rows of standing stones. A century later, in 1776, William Stukeley published his observations and theories on the ancient monuments of Britain. Based on the "sinuous" stone avenues at Avebury, he reasoned that these "Dracontia" (from the Latin *draco* for serpent) funnelled processions of Druids towards the stone circle representing God. The widely expressed belief that the avenue was used as a processional path derives, in large part, from this antiquarian interpretation.

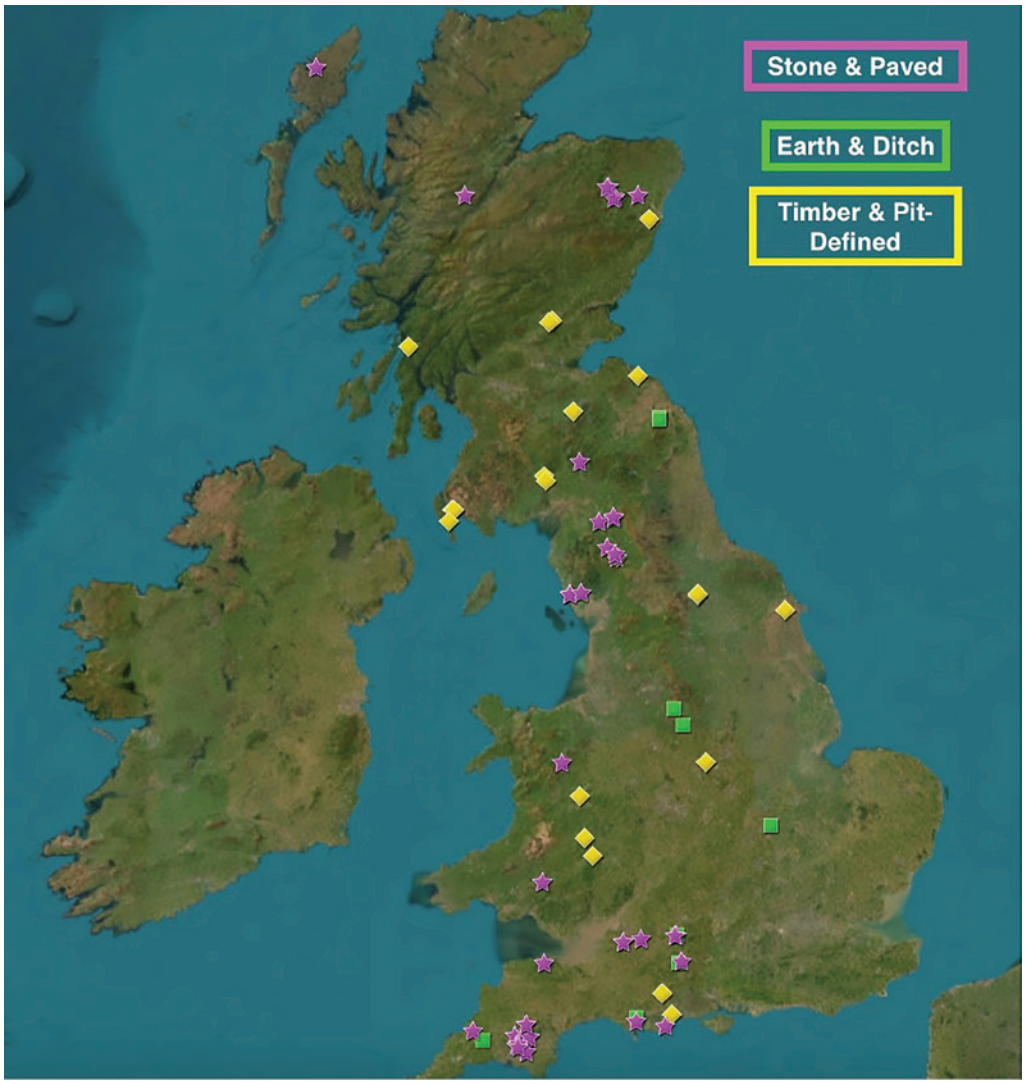
Following the tradition begun by the antiquarians of cataloguing the prehistoric monuments of Britain, the last major printed synthesis and gazetteer of stone rows and avenues was published some three decades ago by Aubrey Burl in his 1993 volume, *From Carnac to Callanish: the prehistoric stone rows and avenues of Britain, Ireland and Brittany*. Although, in recent years, internet catalogues of stone rows have been created (for example, The Stone Rows of Great Britain) as a substantive class of prehistoric monuments, the approaches or pathways that appear to control access to and from many of these 'ritual' enclosures have been overlooked in more recent archaeological investigations. It is, therefore, timely that a new project should review and update research in this field.

In modern times, the evolution of the avenue's definition within the prehistoric monument context begins with Aubrey Burl, who, 30 years ago, defined an avenue as follows:

> 'Classical avenues are double rows that are unequivocally attached to a henge such as Stonehenge or a stone circle like that at Callanish. They were popular in north-west and southern England. It is the conjunction of the row with a ritual enclosure that determines its status as an avenue.' Furthermore, in distinguishing the avenue from the double rows on Dartmoor, he declared that 'Avenues led to stone circles. Double rows led to round cairns or barrows.'

More recently, however, Historic England in 2018 refined Burl's definition to encompass a less specific range of

Left: Calanais, Isle of Lewis. A view along the avenue towards the monument in the south. Observations in 2024–25 may confirm calculations of the moon setting into the stone circle during the Major Lunar Standstill. Right: The suggested avenue at Arbor Low, Derbyshire, looking north towards the monument



All avenues under review, including some that may not be included in the final statistical analysis. Earthstar Geographics, powered by Esri

monuments connected to the avenue and going beyond his unambiguous reference to the henge or stone circle as the target ritual enclosure, 'The term avenue is used to describe particular forms of approach to prehistoric monuments, usually either connecting one monument with another, or with a particular landscape feature'.

The current project proposes the following definition, which consequently determines the inclusion of examples into the research database:

> **'An avenue is defined as a type of open-ended path, routeway, or corridor constructed during the period 4000–1500 BC whose near-parallel edges are characterised by standing stones, pits, timber posts, or earthworks of varying dimensions and whose progress through the landscape either directly or tangentially approaches or departs from a ceremonial or funerary monument of some kind.'**

By adopting this working definition, other specific categories of monuments are excluded, such as cursuses, single or multiple stand-alone pit alignments, single or multiple rows of stones or posts (stone and post rows) aligned on the monument, or double stone rows which are so close together that they do not form a reasonable routeway.

The review of potential examples comprises Burl's original Gazetteer supplemented by recent discoveries, such as those at Arthur's Stone in Herefordshire, Durrington Walls in Wiltshire and Thornborough in North Yorkshire, or potential timber avenues indicated by aerial photography or excavation in Scotland and Wales, such as at Forteviot, Perth and Kinross, or Walton, Powys, respectively.

Of course, several proposed avenues may not bear more exhaustive scrutiny and may not be included in the final statistical analysis. One example is Arbor Low, Derbyshire, whose "avenue" is disputed as a potential field boundary. However, the distribution map of avenues in the updated gazetteer shows that examples appear lacking in large parts of the Midlands, eastern and south-eastern England.

We would be happy to include in the study any recently discovered and unpublished examples of avenues, especially from commercial archaeology. Please let me know of any other examples you may be aware of that conform to the definition above!

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MEETINGS PROGRAMME 2024–2025

DATE	VENUE/FORMAT	DETAILS
2024		
Saturday 7 September 2.00pm	**Lecture** Leeds City Museum, Millennium Square, Leeds, LS2 8BH	***Beyond Symbols of Power: Life in Middle Neolithic grave goods in Eastern Yorkshire***, by Jake Rowland (University of Southampton) Annual joint lecture with Yorkshire Archaeological and Historical Society
Thursday 19 September 7.30pm	**Lecture** Rattray Lecture Theatre, University of Leicester, University Road, LE1 7RH	***Living amongst and with trees at Star Carr,*** by Dr Barry Taylor (University of Chester) Annual joint lecture with Leicestershire Fieldworkers
Monday 7 October 5.00pm	**Lecture** Law Faculty on the Sidgwick Site, University of Cambridge	***'Rewilding' later prehistory: Archaeological wildlife and its role in contemporary nature recovery***, by Dr Anwen Cooper (Oxford Archaeology) Annual joint lecture with Cambridge Antiquarian Society
Saturday 2 November 2.15pm (GMT)	**Lecture** Blended (in-person/ online) Lecture Theatre, Norwich Castle Museum, NR1 3JU	***Reviewing the evidence from Arminghall Timber Circle/ Henge and Warham Camp Iron Age Fort: anchor monuments for the stewardship of prehistoric landscapes***, by Dr Andy Hutcheson (Sainsbury Institute for the Study of Japanese Arts and Cultures) Annual Joint lecture with Norfolk and Norwich Archaeological Society
2025		
Friday 28 February 7.30pm	**Lecture** The United Reform Church Hall, Welwyn Garden City, AL8 6PR	***Chalk Children: death, love and two 5,000-year-old burials from the Yorkshire Wolds***, by Dr Neil Wilkin (British Museum) Annual joint lecture with Welwyn Archaeological Society

We continue to work on our programme with more lectures to be announced later in the year. Meetings may be liable to change. Further details, including how to join virtual meetings, will be available online: http://www.prehistoricsociety.org/events/

Peter Clark Award presented to Henrietta Quinnell

On Saturday 20 April, at the annual Archaeology in Devon day, organised by the Devon Archaeology Society, council member and trustee Dr Susan Greaney presented Henrietta Quinnell with the Peter Clark Award for 2023. This award recognises the vital but often overlooked contribution of fieldworkers or artefact specialists to pre-history. It was awarded to Henrietta for her outstanding career working on ceramics in south-west Britain. She is planning to put the small monetary award towards publication and hopefully radiocarbon dating of one or two neglected Bronze Age vessels from the region.

At the 2024 AGM it was announced that this year's Peter Clark Award will be given to Francis Wenban-Smith of University of Southampton. He will be presented with his award at the Sara Champion Lecture in October.

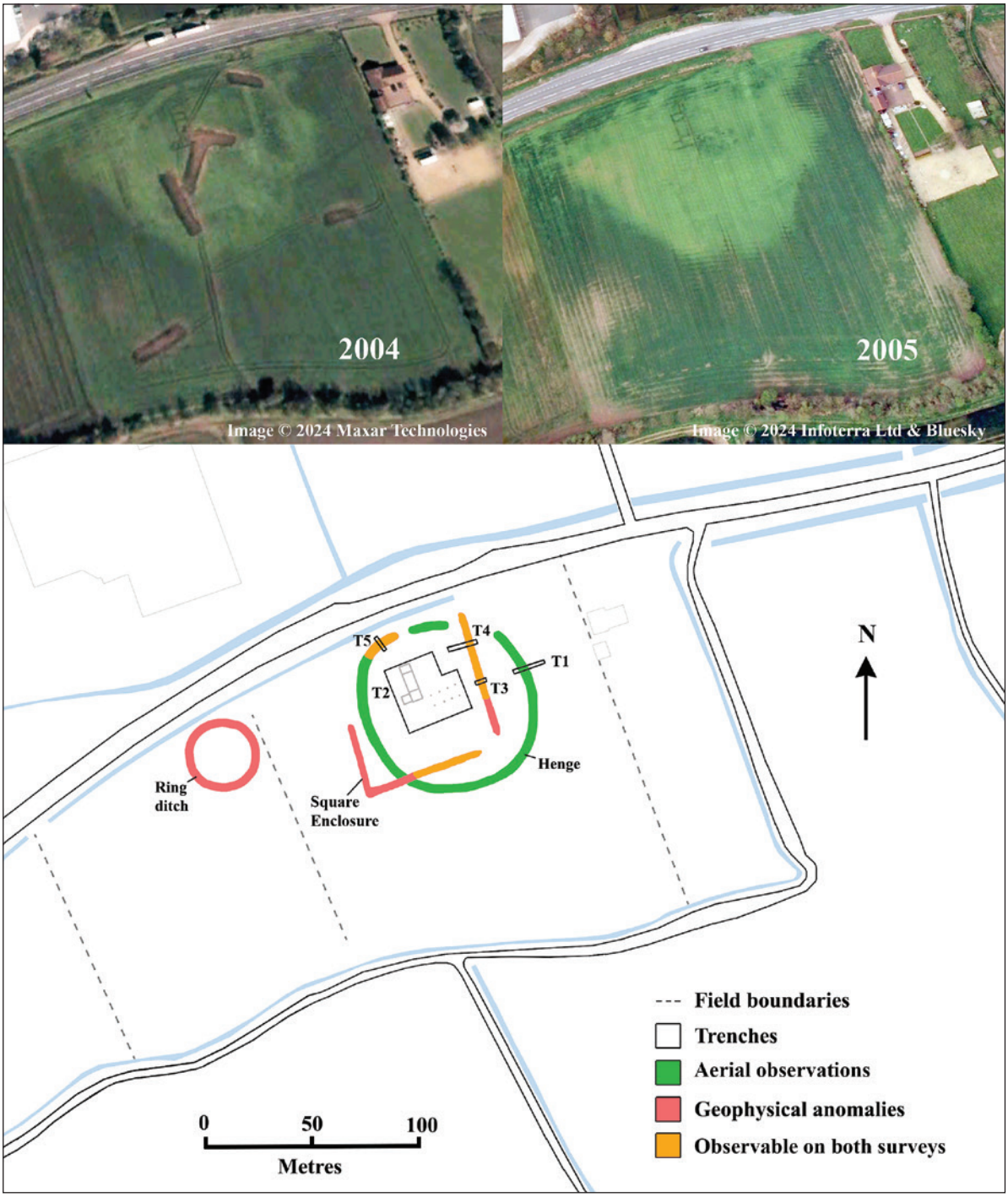
New Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) Status

As previously announced (PAST 102; AGM 2023), we are in the process of changing the legal status of the Prehistoric Society from a Registered Charity to a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO). This is a government scheme introduced to present registered charities such as ours with a better legal structure. This will simplify our legal obligations and reduce the administrative load on the Secretary and Treasurer, who will no longer have to report to both Companies House and the Charity Commission. It will reduce the number of required Trustees from 18 to 12 and provides more flexibility on these numbers in the future. In addition, when incorporated, Trustees enjoy the protection afforded to businesses of limited liability protection, meaning that they are not personally responsible for debts. They do, of course, remain responsible for administering the charity professionally.

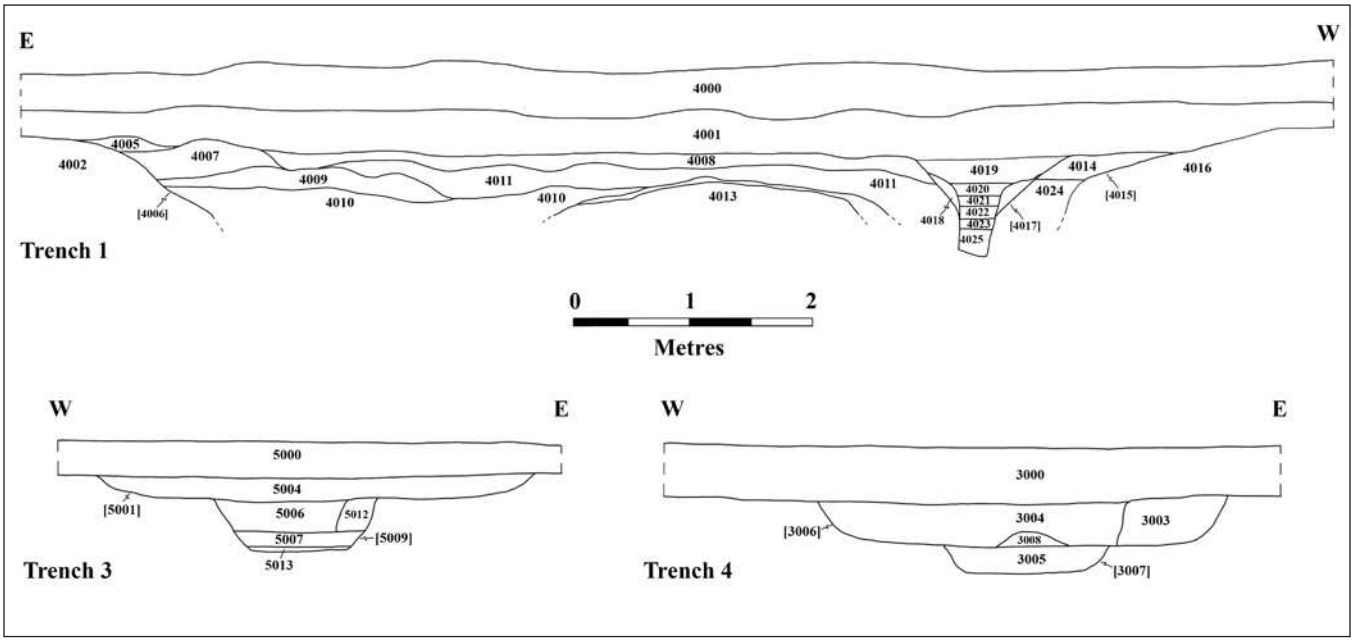
It was agreed at the AGM in 2023 that this route would be pursued, and much hard work has followed to bring it to completion. Meredith Laing, council member and lawyer, has drafted a new constitution which, after approval by the Executive Committee, has been available for members to comment (as announced at the 2024 AGM). The final version of this constitution has now been sent for approval, to confirm our status as a CIO.

The henge at Anchor Church Field, Crowland, Lincolnshire

In the summers of 2021 and 2022, archaeological excavations were undertaken at Anchor Church Field, Crowland, a site that centuries'-old local tradition associates with the early medieval hermits St Guthlac and St Pega. Previous work had confirmed significant archaeological potential, with fieldwalking and evaluation trenching recovering finds spanning the Neolithic to post-medieval periods. A team directed by the author and Dr Hugh Willmott, University of Sheffield, undertook a blended strategy of open area excavations, focussed on buildings visible on aerial photographs and geophysical survey data, combined with targeted evaluation of other features of possible archaeological origin. One of the evaluation trenches was located over a feature only visible on some aerial photographs and satellite imagery; a circular anomaly, measuring approximately 75 m in diameter and surrounded by a ditch approximately c.5 m wide. The trench was positioned over the ditch on the eastern side of the circuit and excavated to a maximum depth of 1.3 m.



Satellite images of the site in 2004 and 2005, and trench locations plotted over observations from geophysical and aerial surveys.



Sections across Trench 1; the posthole is context 4017 and packing clay 4018.

This intervention, nevertheless, confirmed the presence of a ditch, running south-east to north-west through the middle of the trench. Cut into lenses of natural glacial sands and gravels, the ditch was 9 m in width, although this has no doubt been exaggerated by later erosion. The earliest fill encountered was a shallow deposit of apparently redeposited grey-brown clay, overlain by a various lenses of sands and clays. At the eastern edge of the trench were three successive fills of near-identical orange-grey loamy sands, originating just east of the ditch and representing the gradual erosion of an external bank. This bank had been constructed from the natural glacial sands, presumably the fill of the ditch when it was first excavated. Overlying the eroded bank fills, and extending across the whole of the upper ditch, were two final fills the latter of which was an orange-grey sand that probably represents a final deposit once erosion had ceased.

A single posthole, surrounded by packing clay, was cut into this surface, 80 cm from the western edge of the ditch. Small fragments of decayed waterlogged wood were increasingly encountered in the fills as they were excavated. Those from the lowest fills included the curved outer surface of the original post, which was *c*.25 cm in diameter, consistent with the excavated post pipe. The post wood has been identified as being made from ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), and the slight curve of the rings indicates it was formed from a large branch (Ellen Simmons pers. comm.). The post clearly rotted *in situ*, representing the final phase of activity in the trench, being sealed by a 30–35 cm thick band of alluvial clay and the modern plough soil. No datable finds were recovered from the ditch, and in the absence of excavated primary fills, even if present, these would not have indicated a date of construction. A fragment of the post wood, however, was radiocarbon dated to 1510–1320 BC (3160±30, Beta 664348, 95.4% probability), probably 1500–1410 BC (68.2% probability). This dating demonstrates that by the early Middle Bronze Age the majority of the ditch had already become gradually filled in, and the outer bank had severely eroded or had even been deliberately levelled. Whilst the timeframe over which this took place is not possible to determine, it is likely to be a period of several centuries. A second attempt to bottom the ditch was made through excavation of a broader trench in the north-west corner of the circuit, and although again this effort was unsuccessful, it does serve to emphasise the scale of the monument.

Given the diameter of the feature and the proportions of its ditch, in addition to the presence of an external bank and the Middle Bronze Age post cut into its upper fill, it is clear that the feature is a henge constructed in the Neolithic or Early Bronze Age. Although only a single post was identified in the narrow confines of the evaluation trench, its identification suggests that the henge remained a focus of activity until at least the 14th century BC. It is impossible to know whether the post stood in isolation, or if it was part of a larger structure, but its positioning on the inner face of a still-visible ditch makes it tempting to see this as one element of a timber circle focussed on the earlier monument. If this is the case, then the timber circle would have been incorporated into a more extensive Bronze Age complex, with broadly contemporary barrows lining the peninsula, including one immediately west of the site, and terminating at the refurbished henge.

This impressive array of prehistoric monuments was later repurposed in the early medieval period, and the henge was later developed into a high-status hall and chapel by Crowland Abbey. More detail on the henge, and its wider context as part of a sacred landscape, can be found in the *Journal of Field Archaeology*: https://shorturl.at/bjZuT

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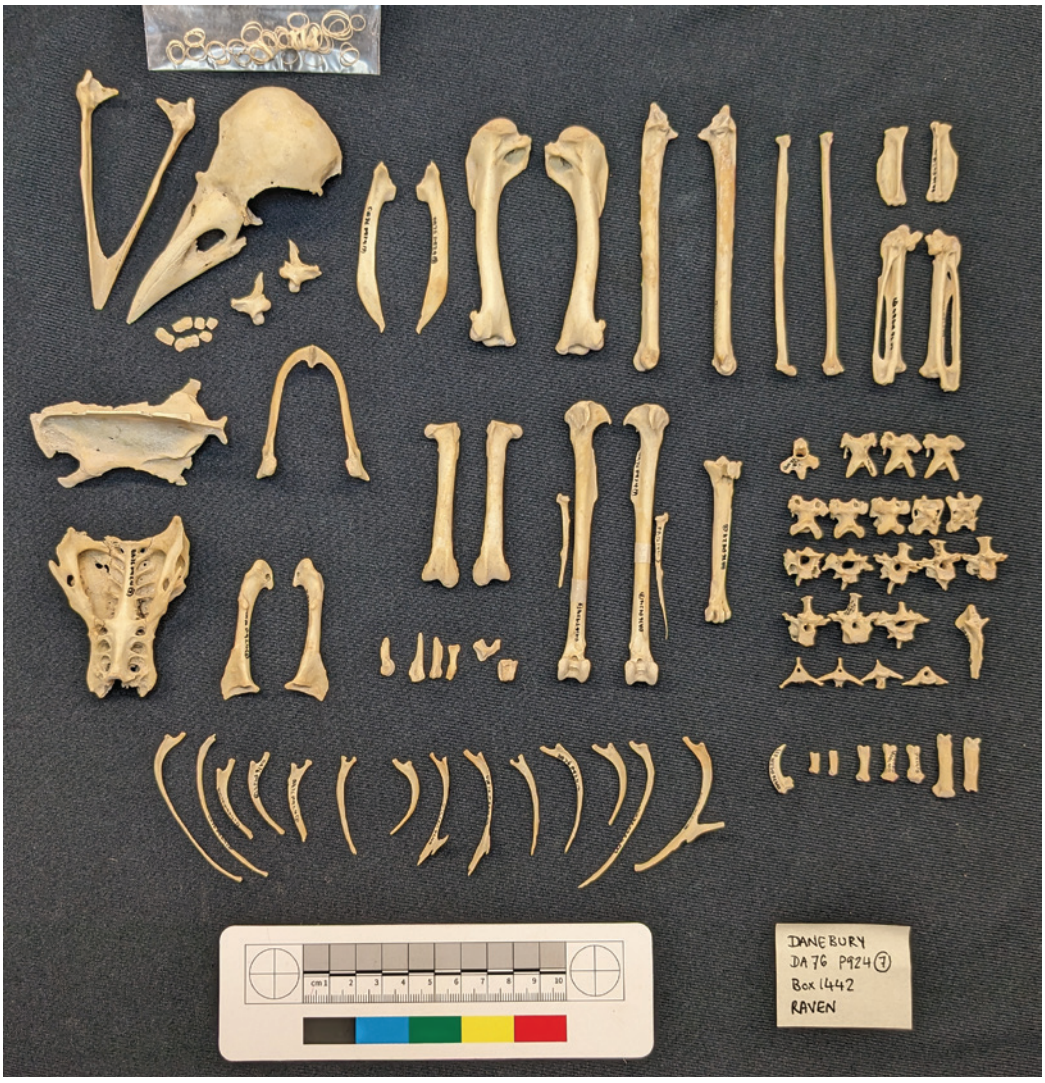
Revered Ravens and the Danebury Dead

Corvids – birds of the crow family, also including ravens, jackdaws, magpies, jays and choughs – are globally ubiquitous omnivorous scavengers, employing their sharp intelligence and savvy sociability to thrive alongside humans. Corvids have lived closely and commensally with people for millennia, adapting to our cultural developments to benefit from our food sources and shelters; through their many interactions with people, these birds have become common within our daily lives, as well featuring prominently in our stories, mythologies and iconography. In fact, crow and raven bones have been critical to arguments of developing symbolic expression in Neanderthals, with evidence that Neanderthals harvested corvids' iridescent black feathers in Middle Palaeolithic Gibraltar, as well as the first instance of an intentionally-embellished bird bone being a decorated raven radius from Upper Palaeolithic Crimea.

Despite famous connections to modern British cultural identity – such as the beloved ravens at the Tower of London, the evocative crow imagery of Ted Hughes' poetry, and Daphne du Maurier's renowned story 'The Birds' which Alfred Hitchcock adapted to film in 1963, forever heightening corvids' connections to horror – little archaeological research has explored corvids' changing perceptions across England's past. Prehistoric evidence tells of intriguing treatments and perceptions of these birds, which are a far cry from modern persecution debates: ravens, crows and magpies in particular are currently key species in debates surrounding the shooting of wild birds in the UK, owing to their historically-rooted reputations as livestock murderers and egg thieves.

Serjeantson and Morris' exemplary 2011 paper on Iron Age and Roman corvids revealed many intriguing deposits of whole crows and ravens across England in both periods, which, when paired with contemporary iconography and mythology, suggest religious or ritual behaviour. Corvids are often associated with realms such as prophecy, death and the afterlife, with ravens as significant totemic birds, often serving as companions and messengers to gods such as Celtic Lugh, Roman Apollo and Norse Odin, as well as being connected with shape-shifting and shamanism.

Of particular interest are the birds from the Iron Age hillfort of Danebury, Hampshire, where corvids made up over 80% of



A beautifully-preserved raven skeleton from Danebury (Image Riley Smallman, with permission from Hampshire Cultural Trust/Hampshire County Council)

3D model of a raven skull from Danebury (full skeleton pictured above), produced via CT scanning in Exeter's SHArD 3D Laboratory (Image Riley Smallman, with permission from Hampshire Cultural Trust/Hampshire County Council)

the recovered ~1,200 bird bones. The majority of these corvids were ravens, many of which had been deposited whole and recovered as articulated skeletons. Both Coy's 1984 and Serjeantson's 2010 analyses found some of these ravens had evidence of arthritis, suggesting they had lived into old age; while we do not know the exact ages of these ravens, ravens in the wild typically live up to 15 years, but when cared for by humans, ravens can live to over 50 years old.

Danebury is also critical to debates surrounding prehistoric human funerary rites: we have uncovered very few human remains from the Iron Age, leading to suggestions that archaeologically-invisible practices must have been common, chief among these being excarnation. Excarnation refers to leaving human remains exposed to the elements and to scavengers – for example, modern sky burials – which can be viewed as returning the deceased individual to nature. Previous research has focused on analysing the few Iron Age skeletal remains available to determine if their bones were exposed prior to being retrieved for secondary deposition, examining evidence of mammalian teeth marks and bioerosion, as well as considering the funerary architecture itself. However, no study has previously considered the potential of looking into scavenger diets for evidence of feasting on human flesh.

Isotope analysis is a powerful scientific tool for investigating a range of archaeological questions, including diet. By sampling a specimen and measuring the ratios of specific carbon and nitrogen isotopes using mass spectrometry, we can graphically plot the diet of sampled individuals, and use this to understand trophic levels – how high the individual is up the food chain – and suggest potential food sources. As omnivores, humans typically occupy high positions in food chains (with pure carnivores even higher); scavenging omnivores like corvids would be expected to plot roughly as high as humans – unless they have been eating human flesh, which would make them plot higher.

Thanks to previous research attention, dietary isotope data for the Danebury human burials as well as other species are already published, allowing for comparison with the new corvid data. Sampling of corvids from sites of other periods also means we can demonstrate that the Iron Age corvid diet differs from their diet within later cultures which did not practise excarnation. Analysis is currently underway, however preliminary results show exciting promise to uncover more about the Danebury dead and their curious relationships with corvids.

Acknowledgements
This research was funded by South, West and Wales Doctoral Training Partnership (Arts and Humanities Research Council), supervised by Naomi Sykes (University of Exeter) and Stuart Black (University of Reading). Archaeological material discussed here was graciously loaned by Ross Turle of Hampshire Cultural Trust/Hampshire County Council, with thanks to all the staff and volunteers at this collection. Further gratitude to Sean Doherty and Carly Ameen for support.

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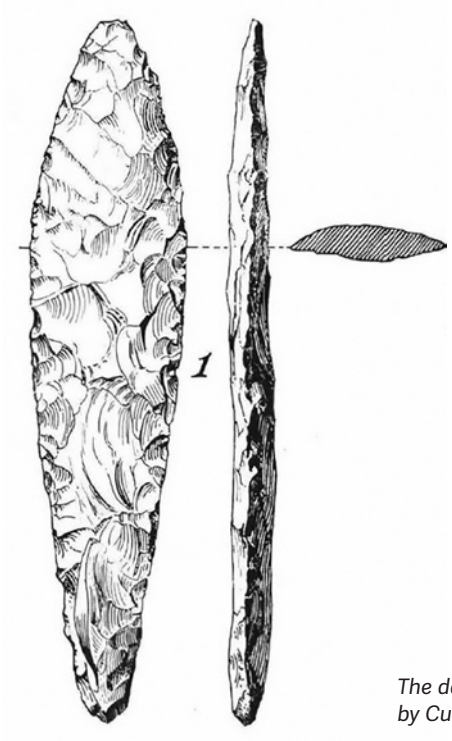
The Springhead Clump lanceolate flint dagger from Parham, Sussex: a genuine find or a planted object?

The Springhead Clump lanceolate flint dagger was published by Eliot Curwen in his 1932 roundup of '*Some noteworthy flints from Sussex*' in the Sussex Archaeological Society Notes and Queries of that year. The flint dagger is illustrated but neither the location, nor finder or owner of the dagger is mentioned in Curwen's article. In his brief 1941 note 'Flint daggers of the Early Bronze Age from Sussex', Curwen again mentioned the Springhead Clump dagger, this time as one of only three 'perfect specimens of this implement' from Sussex, and noted it was 'in the possession of Mr. Harry Price of Pulborough'. During recent research in the Harry Price Archive held at Senate House Library, London, the flint dagger was re-discovered, archived under reference HPI/5/7.

Harry Price, early 20th century writer, thespian, psychic researcher – of Borley Rectory and Gef the Talking Mongoose



The dagger as illustrated by Curwen in 1932

fame – and archaeological forger, lived in Pulborough, close to Parham, Sussex, from 1908 until his death in 1948. During the earlier part of Harry's time in Pulborough he made a number of magnificent archaeological 'discoveries' in the area, which have now been discredited as fakes.

These nationally significant 'finds' include a crude Roman-style bronze statuette, a late Roman 'silver' ingot (apparently made from lead) and a cow bone carved with nonsensical Runic symbols. All such finds were made between 1908 and 1909 in Pulborough. In addition, recent research (see www.bigbookoftorcs.com blog: 'All the right notes but not necessarily in the right order') has suggested that Harry may also have commissioned the manufacture of the apparently Iron Age 'Pulborough Area' torc, a piece ultimately recovered by a detectorist in March 2019.

The flint dagger now located in his archive may be another, as yet unrecognised, faked find. It is mentioned – alongside his other now proven fakes – in his 1942 autobiography, *Search for Truth*: 'Of the prehistoric relics that I discovered in the Pulborough district none is more interesting or rarer than the beautiful Early Bronze Age flint dagger, one of only three perfect specimens found in Sussex (and only 145 in the whole of Great Britain). I found it on the South Downs near Springhead Clump, in the parish of Parham. It is lanceolate in shape and beautifully flaked on its two flat surfaces. It is six inches long and one and a half inches across at its widest point.'

The dagger held in the archive matches both Curwen's 1932 drawing as well as a photograph taken of it in Price's archive. Curwen's description of the dagger, '...a flint dagger 7¼ inches long, found in a cart-rut on the Downs by Springhead Clump, in the parish of Parham, some twenty years ago', would suggest that the find was made in around 1912, well within Harry's amateur archaeologist phase.

While we consider the find location possibly faked, the dagger itself appears to be a legitimate archaeological artefact of approximately the date suggested by Price and Curwen. It is morphologically consistent with Scandinavian flint daggers of Lomborg's (1973) Type 1A. These daggers are characterised by Apel as 'percussion flaked... with their greatest width nearer the top than the middle of the dagger' and date to the first half of the Southern Scandinavian Late Neolithic, *c*.2350–2050 BC. Based on a comparison of colour photographs of the dagger with raw material samples published by Högberg and colleagues, its raw material is consistent with flint outcrops from northern Jutland.

Thousands of flint daggers were produced throughout the Late Neolithic and into the Early Bronze Age (*c*.2350–17/1600 BC) in Southern Scandinavia, with some showing great skill and specialised techniques, including parallel retouch on the well-known Type 1C daggers and the elaborate handle morphologies of the early second millennium 'fishtail' varieties. The relationship between these flint daggers and other dagger varieties in metal or of composite materials is a recurring debate in Scandinavian archaeology, but one of us (CF) has suggested that all of the daggers of different raw materials proliferating throughout Europe from the late fourth to the early second millennium BC form one element of a larger trend to homogenisation of artefact shapes (if not meanings or uses) linked to the intensification and extensification of long-distance mobility and trade.

In Britain, around 400 flint daggers have been recovered. Where these can be dated, they seem to all have been deposited within a couple of centuries during the last quarter of the third millennium BC. Morphologically, they are varied. Some have short tangs or notched edges for the attachment of a handle or wrapping material, others have long tangs

The dagger now held in the Harry Price archive of Senate House Library, Accession Number HPI/5/7

like Scandinavian daggers. Although Lomborg thought the British daggers inspired the type 1A Danish Scandinavian variety, more recent dating and excavation suggests in fact that daggers only began to circulate in Britain and Ireland several generations after their development in the Nordic region, and likely via cross-Channel social and kin links between primarily between people in southeast England and the Netherlands, where Scandinavian type 1 daggers were circulated and deposited. CF has identified fourteen early second millennium Scandinavian daggers recovered from British and Irish contexts, but no sure lanceolate varieties. CF's Class 4 long-tanged British daggers – a group that includes Harry Price's dagger – are extremely similar in form and dimensions to the Type 1A daggers, and some of these may well have been made in southern Scandinavia rather than Britain.

As such, although possible that the dagger was deposited in Sussex, the background of Harry Price and his activities at this date, would suggest caution. There is a high probability that the dagger was purchased in a European market, during one of Harry's numerous travels to the Continent and then – as with so many other of Harry's nationally significant 'finds' – was later planted on Springhead Clump to be found during one of his daily walks with his dog.

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Avebury Papers – Two Years In

The Avebury Papers is a UKRI AHRC-funded project (2022-2026), a collaboration between academics at University of Bristol, University of York, the National Trust, Archaeology Data Service, with support from English Heritage and Historic England.

We are digitising, expanding, and sharing the extensive archive related to the early 20th century excavations at Avebury henge and West Kennet Avenue. This includes over 8,000 paper items and thousands of artefacts held at the Alexander Keiller Museum, alongside a variety of items from other collections including Wiltshire Museum and the Natural History Museum. Although the results of the excavation and restoration work carried out in the 1930s is pivotal to our understanding of the site, it has only been published in the form of short interim reports and a synthetic summary. Although masterful, the latter inevitably elided much of the excavated detail.

A flaked and partly ground and polished flint axe. The axe bears the inscription 'FLINT CELT FOUND BY MRS ST. G. GRAY IN THE KENNETT AVENUE, AVEBURY, 1911'. Alexander Keiller Museum No. 78506166

So, what does digitise, expand, and share actually entail? There are several strands of ongoing work, but, in brief: based at Bristol, Mark Gillings and Ben Chan are adding detail to the catalogue and analysing the detailed structural records and finds generated by the 20th century excavations, mapping the excavations and commissioning a suite of new scientific analyses to effectively complete the post-excavation programme that was begun in the 1930s. At the University of York, Colleen Morgan and Fran Allfrey are leading on digitising and making searchable the photographic prints, plans, letters, diaries and other ephemera that make up the paper collection, and drawing out the stories to create 'narrative pathways' into the archive.

Work in progress highlights: artefacts

Work on the artefactual archive involves digitisation in the form of cataloguing and photography, and new analysis of all key assemblages, principally, faunal remains, human remains, worked flint, pottery and carbonised plant remains.

The catalogue is based upon the existing National Trust and English Heritage museum catalogues, with all artefacts housed in the Alexander Keiller Museum being checked and re-catalogued accordingly. The catalogue currently lists just over 600 items, but the size and complexity of individual entries varies significantly with some catalogue entries representing a single artefact, such as a coin, whilst others represent multiple boxes of artefacts from a single site or context. The majority of artefacts are in good condition, many being still in, or associated with, their original packaging (mostly cigarette boxes!), which detail information on the excavation year, cutting, and feature that artefacts were found in.

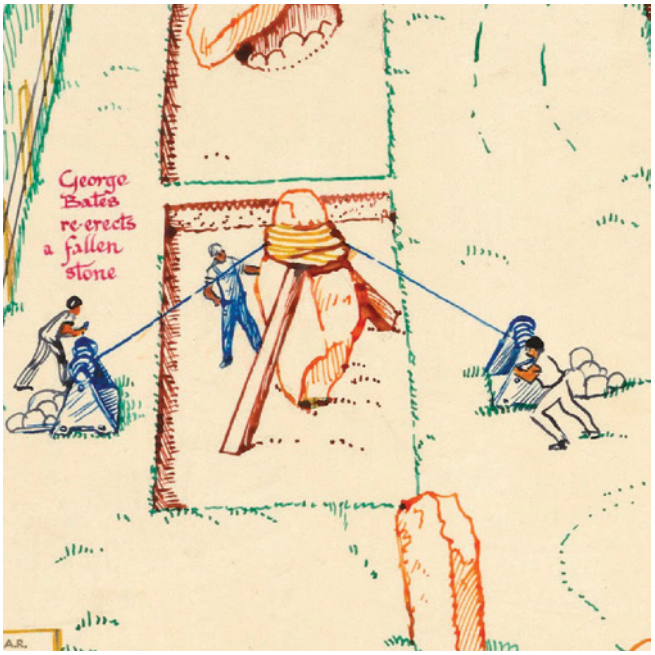
The assemblage of finds associated with the resetting of Stone 41 consisting of worked flint, pottery, fragments of human crania, and a bone or antler tube. Alexander Keiller Museum Nos. 20002116, 20002117, 20002118, 20000819, 78509010

The only major assemblage that has lost its contextual information sometime in the distant past, is the assemblage of flint debitage from the West Kennet Avenue. This is unfortunate given that the majority of artefacts in the assemblage come from the artefact scatter that makes up the Middle Neolithic West Kennet Avenue occupation site, which previous analysis has shown to have retained a high degree of spatial integrity (on this, see Smith, *Windmill Hill and Avebury,* 1965, pp. 210–217; Chan, 'Settling the argument: the contribution of use-wear studies to understanding artefact scatters in Neolithic Britain', *Journal of Archaeological Science Reports,* forthcoming). The news is not all bad, however, as the excavation diaries of Alexander Keiller and William Young contain a wealth of information on the excavations, and in the latter case information in the diaries has allowed us to piece together some of the spatial distributions of the artefacts from the West Kennet Avenue excavations.

Workers on West Kennet Avenue, 1934/35, photographed by William Young. Alexander Keiller Museum No. 20005060-002

In addition to cataloguing the artefacts, new analysis of the key assemblages of worked flint, pottery, faunal remains, human remains and carbonised plant remains has been, or will be, either commissioned or carried out by the project team. This includes specialist analyses such as examining use-wear on the West Kennet Avenue flint assemblage, the petrographic analysis of the medieval pottery assemblage, and the identification of all suitable samples for radiocarbon dating. The latter is of particular importance given the relatively limited state of our current understanding of the dating of Avebury's key phases.

Ultimately, the analysis of the artefacts from Avebury's 20th century excavations will majorly enhance our knowledge of the site and will be conducted with the improved understanding of stratigraphy and context that will arise from the detailed analysis of the project's excavation diaries. The analysis will give us our clearest impression yet of life in and around Avebury in the periods preceding the construction of the monument, during its use in the Late Neolithic, and in its second life in the medieval and post-medieval periods when the village of Avebury grew in and around it.



Detail from Denis Grant King's 'Excavation of the prehistoric temple of Avebury', 1939, depicting George Bates and the 're-erecting gang' in the south-east sector. Alexander Keiller Museum No. 20004595-001

Work in progress highlights: the papers

A team of 35 National Trust volunteers, and students from York, Bournemouth, and Southampton, have been making the digitisation of the paper materials possible. The paper digitisation tasks include: sorting and labelling; cataloguing; photography; and transcription.

Before the project began, the actual number of paper items was unknown, but estimated at 4000. Already, we have catalogued 8500 items and we are still going! These items are photographs, drawings, and diaries made during excavations, and extensive correspondence which reveal the wider networks between Avebury and numerous important archaeologists, artists, and scientists of the early 20th century. Once cataloguing is complete, individual items will be searchable by keywords. Volunteers are also using OCR-assisted and entirely manual methods for transcriptions, and once this task is complete, users will be able to run free text searches across these documents and manuscripts (we're already at over 150,000 words in Alexander Keiller's manuscripts alone).

The diaries kept by Alexander Keiller and Denis Grant King (held at the Alexander Keiller Museum), and William Young (generously loaned for photography and transcription by Wiltshire Museum) are not only revealing important archaeological detail, they are also proving to be vital sources for the understanding the cultural, social, and political contexts of the dig, as understood by the people doing the work. William Young, in particular, made such careful note of the hired local workers that our volunteer research team have been able to create short biographies for the almost 100 labourers who created the Avebury we know today. Recovering the stories of the working-class men, and under-celebrated women, of the excavation team is a core aim for the months ahead.

Student projects are already testing the possibilities of reusing the archive – including creating a teaching resource, online exhibition, and interactive film. A special mention must go to York undergraduate Georgia Smith who won a York Open Research Award for her dissertation which combined practice and research: Georgia designed and delivered a Young Archaeologist Club activity using archive materials.

We've also experimented with creative reuse in collaboration with game-makers, coders, and heritage professionals at the 2024 Heritage Jam, which saw five teams create interpretations based on the assets from the archives, including playable games. Keep an eye on our blog for a write up of this event and to explore the games for yourself!

What's next?

We recently announced our commission of two artists: Gayle Chong Kwan and Kialy Tihngang are 'in residence' over the next year, and we look forward to the new forms of understanding Avebury's archive which will emerge from their work.

YOU can also help shape the look and feel of the online archive! We want to hear from you if you have ever used the Avebury archive (and you have ideas of which objects to highlight; or ways that we can organise the digital archive in ways which will facilitate your research or teaching), or if you have an interest in exploring materials (artefacts or paper documentation) from the Harold St George Gray (1908-1922) excavations of the Avebury bank and ditch, and Alexander Keiller's (1934-1939) work on West Kennet Avenue and Avebury stone circles. Please be in touch with Fran Allfrey (e-mail below) to register your interest in participating in user research. Follow our progress, and read more project updates at aveburypapers.org or on Instagram @AveburyPapers.

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The deadline for submissions for PAST 108 is 16 September 2024. Contributions to Editor, Susan Greaney, University of Exeter, Laver Building, North Park Road, Exeter, EX4 4QE. E-mail: past@prehistoricsociety.org. Contributions as e-mail attachments are preferred (either .docx or .rtf files) with illustrations sent as .jpeg, .tif or .pdf files. The book reviews editor is Helen Chittock, MoLA (Museum of London Archaeology), Mortimer Wheeler House, 46 Eagle Wharf Road, London, N1 7ED. E-mail: reviews@prehistoricsociety.org. Queries over subscriptions and membership should go to the Society administrator at the London address on the front cover. E-mail: admin@prehistoricsociety.org.