

Impact case study (REF3b)

Institution: University of Southampton
Unit of Assessment: 17A Archaeology
Title of case study: 17A-01 Revealing Avebury's prehistoric landscape
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>The University of Southampton's long-term archaeological research at Avebury forms the basis upon which national and international heritage organisations such as the National Trust and UNESCO manage and preserve one of the most important prehistoric landscapes in the world. Local councils have used the research findings to inform their own policy and planning decisions. Research disseminated through museum exhibitions, public engagement events and publications has resulted in increased public interest and understanding of the site, stimulating greater tourism and local economic benefit.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The University of Southampton has been actively engaged in archaeological research within the Avebury component of the UNESCO-designated Stonehenge and Avebury World Heritage Site (WHS) since the late 1980s. Work was first instigated by Prof. Peter Ucko and colleagues, who re-evaluated the documentary evidence of early antiquarian engagement with the Avebury henge and its megalithic avenues. The resultant publication (Ucko et al. 1990 <i>Avebury Reconsidered</i>) highlighted many key issues regarding the structure and purpose of the later Neolithic (c.3000-2400BC) monument complex that remained unclear.</p> <p><i>Avebury Reconsidered</i> provided an impetus for the AHRC-funded Longstones Project (grants 1-2, 1999-2008), a programme of fieldwork directed at better understanding the context and chronology of Avebury's late Neolithic monuments. The project was directed jointly by Dr David Wheatley (Senior Lecturer, 1994-present) and Dr Joshua Pollard (Reader, joined Southampton in February 2011; previously at the University of Wales until 2003, then the University of Bristol), with Dr Mark Gillings (University Leicester). A programme of targeted excavation and fieldsurvey ran over five years (1999-2003), with definitive publication of the results taking place in 2008 [3.1, 3.2, 3.6].</p> <p>The academic value of the Longstones work has been considerable, in terms of enhancing understanding of the Avebury complex, and of the wider phenomenon of monumentality during the Neolithic. Specific outcomes included the re-discovery of the megalithic Beckhampton Avenue – in itself one of the largest megalithic structures in Europe – along with the excavation of a previously unrecognised Neolithic enclosure, one of the region's smaller stone circles (the Falkner's Circle), and the Avebury henge Cove setting (which includes the largest individual megalith in the British Isles). Southampton researchers were able to demonstrate that existing views which see megalithic architecture as having been built to provide arenas for ceremonial practice may be incorrect. Instead, megalithic components of the Avebury complex such as the Beckhampton and West Kennet Avenues had a primarily commemorative or memorialising role; their placement in the landscape and physical structure deliberately referencing past histories of occupation and activity.</p> <p>The current Between the Monuments Project (BtM) in turn builds upon the legacy of the Longstones Project. Its aim is to enhance knowledge of routine life and residence in the Avebury landscape during the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age, and its relationship to monument building [3.4]. Pollard is Principal Investigator; other partners include researchers in the University of Leicester, Allen Environmental Archaeology and the National Trust. It has received support from the British Academy/Leverhulme and Society of Antiquaries (grants 3-4, 2007-2013). Following preliminary work at Rough Leaze, outside the east entrance of the Avebury henge in 2007 [3.5], and geophysical survey in 2012, excavations took place in July 2013 on a middle-late Neolithic settlement on the line of the West Kennet Avenue. The site occupies an important chronological horizon, belonging to a time between major phases of monument building in the region, and at a</p>

point where major transformations in settlement practice and subsistence occurred.

3. References to the research

- 3.1 Gillings, M., Pollard, J., Wheatley, D. & Peterson, R. 2008. *Landscape of the Megaliths: excavation and fieldwork on the Avebury monuments, 1997-2003*. Oxford: Oxbow Books. [This is the definitive report on the Longstones Project.]
- 3.2 Gillings, M., Pollard, J., Peterson, R. & Wheatley, D. 2008. Avebury. *British Archaeology* 103, 28-33. [A key popular synthesis of the work.]
- 3.3 Pollard, J. 2008. Archaeological excavation in the World Heritage Site. In S. Simmonds (ed.), *Avebury World Heritage Site: values and voices*, 10-12. Devizes: Kennet District Council
- 3.4 Pollard, J., Allen, M., Cleal, R., French, C., Gardiner, J., Gillings, M., McFadyen, L. & Snashall, N. 2011. Between the Monuments: new fieldwork at Avebury. *PAST* 68, 10-11
- 3.5 Pollard, J., Allen, M., Cleal, R., Snashall, N., Gunter, J., Roberts, V. & Robinson, D. 2012. East of Avebury: tracing prehistoric activity and environmental change in the environs of Avebury henge (excavations at Rough Leaze 2007). *Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine* 105, 1-20
- 3.6 Wheatley, D. & Murrieta Flores, P. 2008. Grandes piedras en un mundo cambiante: los monumentos megalíticos en sus paisajes. Seville: *Boletín del Instituto Andaluz del Patrimonio Histórico* 67, 24-33. <http://eprints.soton.ac.uk/157879/>

Grants

Longstones Project:

1. AHRC. 2000-2004. Awarded to Gillings, Pollard & Wheatley. £149,362
2. AHRC. 2006. Research leave scheme. Awarded to Gillings, Pollard & Wheatley. £42,039

Between the Monuments:

3. British Academy/Leverhulme 2013. £9,200
4. Society of Antiquaries. 2013. £5,000

4. Details of the impact

Pollard and Wheatley's research has directly informed local, national and international World Heritage Site conservation strategies, significantly contributed to tourist income generation and furthered public understanding of Neolithic Britain.

This research's unique contribution was recognised in 2009 when the Longstones Project was highlighted by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) to illustrate 'the great diversity and variety of impact from arts and humanities research' [5.1]; and in 2012 when it was singled out in the Heritage Action forum as an 'example of really good public engagement' [5.2].

Impact is further evidenced through:

Local economy

The most recent audit of economic impact from the Longstones Project for AHRC in 2007 estimated archaeological research in the Avebury WHS had generated an additional £13m of visitor expenditure [5.3]. Although this audit just predates the impact period, such economic benefit has continued and grown as a result of new work, as evidenced by a steady rise in visitor numbers from 65,247 in 2008-9 to 86,283 in 2011-12.

In her letter to support this study, Rosamund Cleal, Curator of the National Trust's (NT's) Alexander Keiller Museum (AKM), said: "the expectation on the part of the public that research will

reveal more information about the sites and the necessity to draw visitors back to the site to generate revenue means that there is an ongoing need for research..." [5.4]. The results of both Southampton projects fed directly into the creation of displays, interpretative and interactive devices within AKM's permanent exhibition, accessed by more than 150,000 public visitors since 2008 [5.5]. In 2009 AKM's Stables gallery was refreshed "drawing substantially on the Longstones Project results... seeing more than 50,000 visitors across its threshold in (2012-2013)". As a pay-for-entry part of the Avebury property, Southampton-led research has been an important source of revenue for the NT as well as having contributed to better public understanding and appreciation of Britain's prehistory [5.4].

Pollard and Wheatley's publications (including 3.1) have been used as core texts for NT volunteer training since 2008 and form the basis for a series of NT guided walks within Avebury. Around 10,000 members of the public have participated in these walks since 2009, paying £3 each which goes directly towards care and conservation of the WHS [5.5].

Management

Effective management of the region's internationally significant prehistoric archaeology is key to maintaining its WHS status. Southampton research has directly informed the management strategies of heritage curators (the National Trust, English Heritage and Wiltshire Council). It directs attention to the significance of areas previously overlooked or not properly understood. Facilitating a more complete understanding of the significance of the WHS, this has aided the production of a retrospective Statement of Outstanding Universal Value (SOUV) adopted by UNESCO's World Heritage Committee in June 2013 [5.6]. This is now a key document in planning and development control.

There has been demonstrable impact on management and land-use strategies; for example:

- the Longstones enclosure and Beckhampton Avenue are now targeted as high priorities within the Avebury WHS Arable Reversion Project (a WHS 'first'), enabling Natural England to target Higher Level Stewardship scheme funding and protect the area's globally significant archaeology [5.7];
- fieldwork by the BtM Project at Rough Leaze highlighted that area's archaeological sensitivity, leading to the reversal of a decision to employ that area for solstice festival camping and parking (2008 onwards) [5.5];
- research on the Beckhampton Avenue was fundamental in informing planning responses to developments on Avebury High Street (2009-11) [5.7];
- the results of Longstones research influenced the £500,000 English Heritage conservation project on Silbury Hill (2007-8) [5.8].

In 2008 Pollard was invited by the Irish Government to speak to key stakeholders associated with the *Brú na Bóinne* WHS about Avebury projects as part of their official process to form a new research strategy [5.9].

Public engagements

Southampton research has been further disseminated through public lectures, reaching a cumulative audience in excess of 1000 people since 2008 alone.

During the first 6 months of 2013 Pollard contributed interviews detailing Avebury findings to BBC 2's *Sacred Wonders of Britain* and Channel 4's *Walking Through History* (series 2) [5.10].

The research is acknowledged as providing key sources of information in books by the novelist Jenni Mills (for *The Buried Circle*, an archaeological thriller set in Avebury, HarperCollins, 2009) and Bob Trubshaw (*Beyond the Henge*, which explores Avebury's prehistoric landscape, Albion, 2012).

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Immense public interest generated during the Longstones Project was a catalyst for the production of a collaborative WHS residents information pack (2008), instrumental in developing local awareness of the work of archaeologists [3.3].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

5.1 <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/What-We-Do/Build-the-evidence-base/Impact-examples/Documents/Archaeology-at-Avebury.pdf>

5.2 <http://heritageaction.wordpress.com/2013/07/10/the-value-of-public-engagement-a-consumers-view/>

5.3 <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/Funded-Research/Browse-Case-Studies/Pages/Avebury-and-the-Longstones-Project.aspx>

5.4 Letter from Ros Cleal (Curator of the Avebury Alexander Keiller Museum)

5.5 Letter from Nick Snashall (National Trust Archaeologist, Avebury & Stonehenge)

5.6

<http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/artsheritageandlibraries/museumhistoryheritage/worldheritagesite/stonehengeandaveburysouv.htm>

5.7 Letter from Sarah Simmonds (WHS Officer)

5.8 Letter from Dave Field (former Archaeologist, English Heritage)

5.9 <http://www.newgrange.com/news10.htm>

5.10 BBC2: **Sacred Wonders of Britain**, Series Producer: Martin Kemp
<http://www.pbshowfolio.com/martinkemp>

Channel 4 **Walking Through History**, produced by Vic Procter for 'Wildfire Television'
<http://www.wildfiretv.co.uk/productions/walking-through-history-with-tony-robinson>

Please note: These contact details are for the names of key people associated with each television programme.