



People of the Heath
Understanding and Conserving Petersfield's
Prehistoric Barrows
Bulletin no 3
November 2014



After the intensity of the September excavation season, activity on the project has been lower key. Nevertheless, equally important things have been happening, not least the second season of geophysical surveys in readiness for next year's first excavation. Two barrows, numbers 18 and 21, were surveyed in rather unsettled weather earlier in November by a small team under the direction of Nev and Mary Haskins (see elsewhere on the website for their full report). In both cases the visible mound was distinguishable in the geophysics plots as an area of lower resistance soil than the surrounding ground, but there are other variations in resistance that are less easy to understand. A necessary preliminary was the clearance of scrub, kindly undertaken again by the Friends of Petersfield Heath. Barrow 18 had become overgrown with birch, gorse and bramble which was almost impenetrable, while Barrow 21 was similarly difficult of access across its eastern half. Several mature trees remain on Barrow 21. The recent clearance offers for the first time in many years the opportunity to observe the form of these two barrows properly. This work also readies them for the topographic surveyor's next stint early next year.

On the ground Barrow 18 (just north of the main car park) appears to comprise a straightforward round mound, although this is abutted, or even impinged upon by the lakeside walkway and we cannot rule out there having been some modification to its form at the time of enclosing the lake. There is no clear evidence for an encircling ditch in either the surface morphology or the geophysics plot, but we will nevertheless check whether one is present in the course of the planned excavation. The mound is of modest height (less than a metre) and fairly regular in shape away from the walkway, so the 'arms' of lower resistance projecting from it on the north-west, east and south sides are intriguing. One possibility is that there are later ditches running up to or even onto the barrow, but if so they have been completely filled. Again, this is something to test in the excavation.

Barrow 21 has intrigued us since our preliminary explorations of the cemetery. It lies somewhat detached from the other barrows in the south-east corner of the Heath and is distinctly longer than it is wide (about 40 x 25m, aligned NNE-SSW). We always suspected that this was not remotely a round barrow, or even two conjoined barrows; with two overlapping mounds, one would have expected to see a dip in the middle of the long profile as well as a slightly figure-of-eight plan. As long ago as 1939, Leslie Grinsell listed it as 'oval'. Now that we can see its form more readily, disturbance on any scale seems unlikely for it has fairly even, gentle profiles all round except where it is abutted on the north-west side by a bank delineating a golf green. A long-established footpath also impinges on this side, while adjacent to the south end of the mound is another golf green. These features may not have interfered much with the mound itself, but they do complicate the topography of the immediate environs and this is reflected to some extent in the variable soil resistivity seen on the geophysics plot around the west and south sides.

At present we are working on the hypothesis that this is genuinely an oval barrow (an alternative term is 'short long barrow') and therefore much more likely to be of Neolithic date than Early Bronze Age, assuming of course that it is not something much later, like a

pillow-mound for housing rabbits! It is one of two probable oval barrows on the Heath (the other is no 8), both of which we hope to investigate over the course of the project. If these two do prove to be Neolithic, then they add a very important phase to the cemetery and could be considerably earlier than the mass of round barrows. As Neolithic barrows, there is still the possibility of either an encircling ditch, or two ditches flanking the long sides. No obvious indication of either form came from the geophysics survey of Barrow 21, but presence/absence needs to be checked in order to be sure of the original form and also to provide information to assist with archaeological management. The consistently low values of the resistivity measurements over the mound suggest that it is composed of a relatively moisture-retaining material, high in humic matter and perhaps therefore turf-rich, as we saw superbly in Barrow 11 this September.

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Stuart Needham & George Anelay
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