



People of the Heath

Understanding and Conserving Petersfield's Prehistoric Barrows

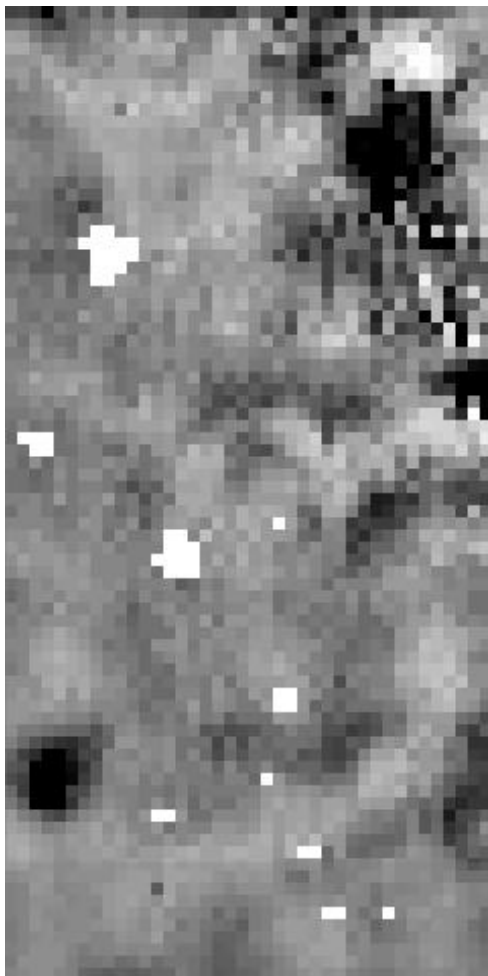
Bulletin no 8

May 2016



In the six months since Bulletin no 7 much has been happening in the People of the Heath project. There has been a further geophysical survey, a visit to study relevant collections at the British Museum and a second successful season of survey by the Regional Barrows Survey Team. Other events that have taken place are a field trip around the barrow complex on Iping Common and various lectures, including one to the Bronze Age Forum held at Exeter University; this was the first exposure of the project to a more specialist audience. During the winter months, the Community Payback Team have continued to work wonders with barrow clearance; those who regularly walk the Heath will have observed some amazing transformations. At the time of writing the fourth season of excavation is already upon us; this will justify its own Bulletin in due course.

Fifth geophysical survey (3-5 March 2016)



Mary Haskins, assisted by Carl Raven and Lyn Pease, took a team onto Petersfield Heath for the fifth time in early March. Having already surveyed two of the sites to be tackled by excavation this spring, the main objective was to add a third – Barrow 16 – which had hitherto been inaccessible under thick scrub. Indeed, even with the scrub removed by the Community Payback Team, it was not straightforward identifying this low-profile monument. The geophysical survey was thus doubly important. Since Barrow 16 lies very close to Barrow 17, the opportunity was taken to re-survey the latter. This had the potential to give better or different definition given changed ground-water content and also enabled the two to be represented side by side in consistent environmental conditions. In the event, the plot obtained for Barrow 17 was not dissimilar to that previously got, featuring some striking high-resistivity zones, in part apparently marking out the ditch. Barrow 16 does not show in the same way at all. Only with the prior knowledge provided by its earlier mapped location is it really possible to identify a faint annular feature (low resistivity) of appropriately small diameter. Nevertheless, something seems to be there in the

Figure 1 Part of the latest geophysical survey showing the hints of Barrow 16 in the centre and other possible features to the south; the dark diagonal swathe across the north-east corner (top right) is due to compaction under the footpath

right place, and there is now a good target for excavation sampling. It is possible that other features of archaeological interest occur just to its south, towards Barrow 20. The survey area was deliberately taken right up to the foot of Barrow 20 on its northern side to look for a buried ditch; no sign of one is evident.

The full report on this survey season can be found elsewhere on the website.

Behind the scenes at the British Museum (18 February 2016)

Following on from the successful visit last year to the Novium's stores at Fishbourne, a comparable event was planned with the British Museum; again it was a 'sell-out' (albeit, of course, a free event). A party of thirty were treated to a fine spread of material for discussion at two sites – a morning session was held in the Department of Europe and Prehistory in the main museum at Bloomsbury, and then we decamped to the Frank's House outstation in Hoxton where much of the reserve collections are housed. The event was only made possible through the willing cooperation of Dr Neil Wilkin, Curator of the European Bronze Age collections, and some of his colleagues – the People of the Heath project is extremely grateful for this rare opportunity as well as for Neil's inputs on the day.

The British Museum's collections have been amassing for a long time and that longevity alone tends to mean it holds important material from most parts of the country (not to mention many parts of the globe). Certainly the museum holds a sufficiently impressive variety of objects from our region of interest that there was ample to absorb us for a day. Amongst the highpoints were two hoards which happen to 'frame' the Rother Valley: part of the large, nationally important Late Bronze Age weapon hoard from Blackmoor at the head of the valley, and the equally significant Middle Bronze Age goldworkers' hoard from Fitzleroi Farm, near Fittleworth, at the base of the valley. There was much else from between and a little further afield, and even an unexpected treat for all of us – a privileged view of a brand new find of a massive gold torc, sadly *not* from our region.

Although less stunning, one object merited our especial attention because it is a rare close parallel for the perforated whetstone from Petersfield Barrow 11. It was excavated in the mid-



nineteenth century under the auspices of the Archaeological Institute during their Chichester meeting from one of the Devil's Humps on Bow Hill with their dramatic view over the coastal plain. Augustus Wollaston Franks, a long-standing and acquisitive curator of the BM, superintended the excavations. According to the brief published account, the whetstone was found amongst burnt bones resting on burnt earth in an undisturbed part of a 'cavity' (pit or grave) that had otherwise been previously emptied. The Bow Hill whetstone has only been briefly mentioned a couple of times in the archaeological literature over the past 160 years and will deserve better exposure in the context of our work.

Figure 2 The Bow Hill perforated whetstone (British Museum 1854,0728.1); the black line is 50mm long; image Stuart Needham

Field trip to Iping Common (10 March 2016)

This trip was rather less well attended than that on Harting Downs a year ago, but a modest band of troupers were able to experience at first hand much of this large complex of barrows. Iping Common (actually the meeting point of various parishes) holds the next large barrow group east of Petersfield, a slightly smaller intervening one having previously occupied West Heath, Harting (now mainly lost to quarrying). Despite broad similarity in numbers of monuments, the spacing of the Iping group is dramatically different from that at Petersfield, being a series of small clusters spread over a much larger area. Iping also lacks the variety of barrow forms seen at Petersfield, although the recent discovery of a low enclosure barrow has eroded the total predominance of ‘bowl’ barrows there.



Figure 3 The recently discovered probable enclosure barrow on Iping common; about a third of the circuit is seen running across the photograph and only half survives due to probable truncation by a later droveway

In addition to the Bronze Age monuments, members were able to inspect and discuss a range of other archaeological features in this ‘marginal’ heathland landscape, ranging from probable military dug-outs, rifle butt, historic period droveways, plantation embankments, an elongate enclosure and the Chichester-Silchester Roman Road. The latter makes a striking addition to the central, Fitzhall Heath, cluster of barrows as it passes through their alignment.



Figure 4 The Roman Road on Iping Common – traversing the low ridge as well as a re-modelled barrow? The flanking ditches can be seen to either side of an over-raised roadway

Part of its impact derives from a curious and uncharacteristic upward bulge in the profile of the road as it crosses the small natural ridge occupied by the barrows – the best explanation is that the road crosses another, hitherto unrecognised barrow, which was strongly modified, but not entirely levelled by the Roman engineers! We also noted the historically important Mesolithic site and talked about the implications of Geoffrey Dimbleby’s early pollen analyses there and at the nearby now-destroyed barrow in Minsted Quarry.

Regional barrows survey

Iping Common happened to be where we began the Regional Barrows Survey sixteen months ago. Since then, the small band of dedicated fieldworkers has visited and recorded just over 200 barrows or potential barrows. Most of these are at sites within the Rother Valley, our core area of interest. But we have also already made forays into the equally relevant ‘peripheral’ distributions on the high Downs to south and west. In the final analysis, comparisons between heathland groups and downland groups may prove to be important for our understanding of how communities used and perceived their varied landscape when it came to structuring the world of their ancestors; another crucial question is whether the barrow groups shed light on the territorial basis of social groups of the time.

Of the sites investigated thus far as many as thirty are either wholly new or are sites not previously identified as ‘barrows’. By no means all these additions can be treated as certain, but some have as good a claim to consideration as ‘barrows’ or related features as many of the long accepted examples. A high proportion are mounds or enclosures of low profile or ambiguous identification, and this of course explains why they have been overlooked. Others are more surprising omissions from the archaeological record, most strikingly at Cranmer Pond, Whitehill, where four barrows forming a small linear cemetery were apparently only first recorded early this year! They clearly relate to a long-known barrow only 100m away.

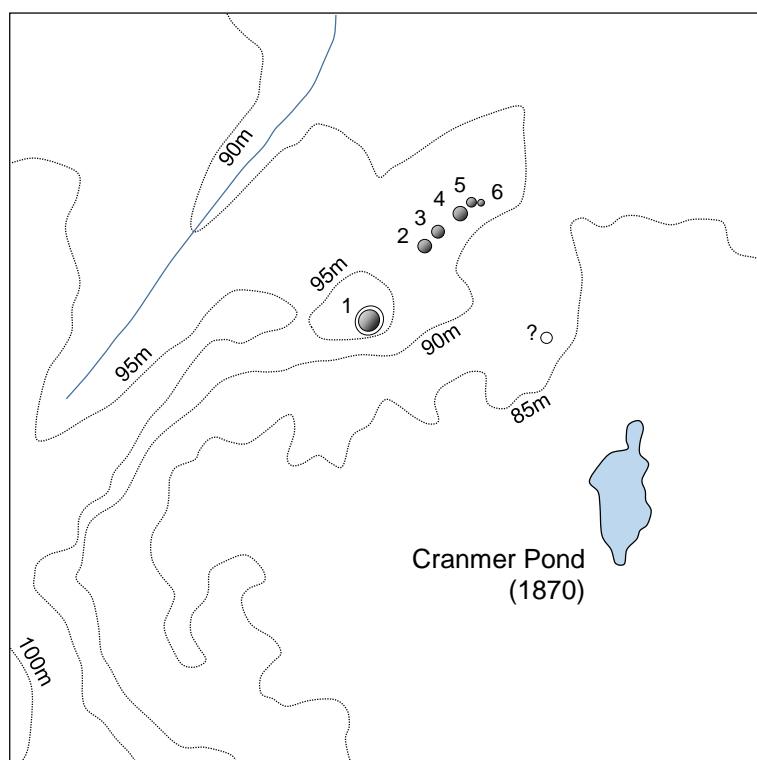


Figure 5 Plan of Cranmer Pond cemetery. The ‘Gunsite’ barrow (on private land) has been known for a long time; the others also lie on private land which is managed by the Amphibian & Reptile Conservation Trust

This new cemetery is discussed in greater depth in a separate report on this website, a report generated to help notify and guide the interested parties.

There were numerous other rewarding studies this season. One came as a result of gaining access to the Duncton Common (Heath End) barrow group, a fine linear cemetery of 10 barrows, all scheduled ancient monuments, distributed along an east-west ridge which now stands in a somewhat incongruous landscape setting. Former and current quarrying surround the ridge top to north, east and south. Partially encircling the ridge top, and perhaps once fully so, is a low and broad bank with outer ditch of unknown age. Another site with highly restricted access is Longmoor Firing Ranges, where firing halts for only two days a month and fieldwork such as ours has to go through official military channels. This proved to be an interesting experience quite aside from being able to visit the fifteen sites within the Ranges and a good number more on the military training zone of Weaver's Down.



Figure 6 Duncton Common (Heath End) linear barrow group perched on a ridge made more prominent by quarrying to north, east and south

The Barrow 13 cremation bearer

Most of the grave goods from September's excavation into Barrow 13 have seen no further action other than careful cleaning to remove loose soil and sand. The object we interpret as a mineral-replaced wooden handle, uncovered skilfully in the ground by Terry Clemens, is another matter altogether. Having successfully lifted it on a block of soil, a complex sequence of actions had to follow if it was to have any hope of survival as an object. The sequence in brief is as follows: 1) wrapping of the soil plinth beneath the object to ensure no collapse or subsidence; tidying of its surface surrounding the object; 2) removal of any residual loose sediment from the upper surface and sides of the object; 3) recording of that face of the object, including 3D-photogrammetry stage 1 (see Bulletin no 7); 4) covering top and sides with a cling-film separator and then the application of a thick layer of plaster, this making contact with the remaining soil of the plinth supporting the object; 5) a board is placed on the plaster while still damp; this provides a base for the object once turned and also allows the whole unit to be taped for security whilst turning it over; 6) unit turned over; 7) tapes cut and

under-board, now on top, removed; 8) soil plinth excavated to reveal the underside of the mineral-replaced object, which sits in its plaster cradle; a former probable root-hole had penetrated across the middle of the under-face, so a marked hollow was left after excavation; 9) recording and 3D-photogrammetry stage 2; 10) soft-packing of any gaps, covering of object and plaster cradle with cling-film separator, followed by application of thick layer of plaster on top, to form a removable lid; 11) transportation of the object in its plaster 'box' to Winchester; 12) conservation by Claire Woodhead, Hampshire Cultural Trust.

As a result of this almost miraculous conservation, visitors to Petersfield Museum during the 2016 open season will be able to view the complete grave inventory from Barrow 13.



Figure 7 Various stages during the 'laboratory' excavation of the cremation bearer (left column top to bottom, then right column top to bottom)

Forthcoming

Look out for notice of the next museums visit which is currently being planned with Hampshire Cultural Trust and will take place in Winchester during June. There will probably also be a regional sites tour this summer.

The current excavation season, investigating Barrows 8, 16 and 17, runs until Saturday 14 May. Free site tours are run every working day (Tuesday to Saturday) at 4.30pm; meet at the Heath entrance opposite Rival Moor Road where you will see a blue container store.

The South Downs National Park Authority's *Secrets of the Heath* event will take place again on Petersfield Heath this year, 3-4 September. We are planning to start our fifth excavation season a little early in order to give added interest to the event. This season already has an added dimension – a team of students led by Dr Nick Thorpe of Winchester University will be adding their muscle power, skills and insights to the campaign. Their focus will be on getting a better understanding of Site 24, the enigmatic oval enclosure which has been shown to be contemporary with the Early Bronze Age complex (Bulletin nos 2 & 4).

Don't forget to drop into Petersfield Museum to view the Barrow 13 grave group. A preliminary statement on the significance of the two grave groups will be posted on the website soon.

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'People of the Heath' is supported by

