

RESEARCH UPDATE

Whitehawk Camp Community Archaeology Project: A Report from the Archives

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In 2014, the Whitehawk Camp partnership was awarded £99,300 under the Heritage Lottery Fund's (HLF) 'Our Heritage' scheme to run the Whitehawk Camp Community Archaeology Project in Brighton, East Sussex. The Project ran for 12 months from April 2014 to March 2015. The Partnership behind the bid comprised the Centre for Applied Archaeology (UCL), Royal Pavilion and Museums (RPM) and the Brighton and Hove Archaeological Society (BHAS). The overall aim of the Project was to raise awareness of Whitehawk Camp, a superb example of an Early Neolithic causewayed enclosure, and to protect the site and existing archive through greater community involvement.

Causewayed enclosures appeared across southern and central Britain from the 38th century BCE and construction at Whitehawk is thought to have begun by *circa* 3,650 cal BCE (Whittle *et al.* 2011, 225–6, 840–1). The Camp, comprising four rings of banks and ditches interrupted by multiple causeways, is located on Whitehawk Hill, a southerly limb of the

South Downs, which extends into and overlooks the City of Brighton and Hove (NGR 533001 104756). The stand and racecourse of Brighton Racecourse lie to the north of the monument. The site was first recorded in sketches by the Reverend John Skinner in 1821 which show the monument lying within largely rural downland scenery (Oswald *et al.* 2001, 12, 103). During the later 19th century, urban growth began to encroach on the monument (Ordnance Survey 1st edition 1877, 2nd edition 1896). Despite being given scheduled monument status in 1923 the site has suffered from numerous impacts during the 20th century including an extension to the pulling-up track of the racecourse, allotment gardening, the running of a road and services through the site, vehicles accessing the site, and fly-tipping of rubbish (ASE 2009).

In order to raise the profile of the Camp the project team worked with local residents to carry out a variety of site, archive and community based activities including an archive programme, a community excavation, training in geophysical survey, site improvement works, and a school, community and events outreach programme. 136 people volunteered on the Project and gave 3,578 hours of volunteer time (Orange *et al.* 2015).

This article provides an update on the archive programme based at RPM. The bulk of the archive relates to a survey and three

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excavations conducted during the 1920s and 30s including:

1. A boring survey (testing the ground for presence of buried ditches or structures) and an excavation in 1928–9 led by E. Cecil Curwen of the Sussex Archaeological Society (SAS) and R.P. Ross Williamson, with members of the Brighton and Hove Archaeological Club (now Society) (Ross Williamson 1930) (**Fig. 1**);
2. An excavation conducted in 1932–33, led by Curwen, with a team of local amateur archaeologists and hired labour (Curwen 1934);
3. An excavation in 1935, led by Curwen but also involving students of Mortimer Wheeler who employed Wheeler's method of recording (Curwen 1936).

These excavations produced particularly rich assemblages of stratigraphically secure finds and the RPM archive has an impressive

range of finds that relate to diverse aspects of Neolithic society, including tool manufacture, animal husbandry and butchery practice, subsistence patterns, pottery use and decoration, use of wild resources and funerary practice. The archive also has many unusual and enigmatic objects, such as the incised chalk 'chessboard', other carved chalk objects, sea urchin fossils, and a paper record in the form of some original plans and drawings and one site notebook from 1935. Parts of the archive, including skeletal material and a restored pot, were on display at the Museum in the 1990s. However, until the current project the archive was largely uncatalogued and much of the archive had remained in storage in its original packing and with original labels, themselves an important record of the history of archaeology and early archaeological practice.

Activities at RPM involved 24 volunteers working behind the scenes (**Fig. 2**). Museum staff delivered training sessions in archive



Figure 1: 'Whitehawk: Inner Ditch'. From Whitehawk Slide Show of Curwen images from the Sussex Archaeological Society, Whitehawk Camp Community Archaeology Project via Image Store. Photo © The Sussex Archaeological Society.

processes and management, and volunteers repacked objects, entered object descriptions on to the Museum's database, stabilised and photographed objects and scanned the paper and photographic archive.

A call for material held by other museums had some success in identifying small numbers of sherds at West Berkshire Museum and Manchester Museum and a collection of animal bone at the Natural History Museum. It was already known that the archive of the SAS held finds, paper and photographic records relating to the site, through its association with Curwen. SAS generously lent their archive to the RPM enabling further study and digitisation. An exciting part of the SAS archive is a collection of over 80 glass lantern slides of the 1930s excavations. A digital archive comprising publications, illustrations and drawings, photographs and scrapbooks of images of artefacts is now available under the terms of a Creative Commons BY-NC-SA 4.0 licence via the museum's *Image*

Store (RPM 2012). The digital archive is aimed at providing research opportunities for both non-specialist and specialist audiences.

An online digital game – *Stone Age Quest* – (RPM 2015a) was co-developed by volunteers, professional designers, schools and RPM staff to introduce children to the site and the Neolithic period and to address teaching needs associated with the introduction of pre-history to the National History Curriculum. The game uses Neolithic and Mesolithic cartoon characters to discuss issues relating to the building of Whitehawk Camp and to the change of lifestyle and culture at the beginning of the Neolithic period. To reach wider audiences, a free download *Geolocation Story Drop App* for smartphones was also developed (RPM 2015b). The App works like a historical treasure hunt, guiding participants to locations around the city of Brighton and Hove. Project volunteers created content in the form of short passages of text on objects that had particularly intrigued them.



Figure 2: Project volunteers repacking the archive. (Photo: Royal Pavilion and Museums, Brighton and Hove).

As part of the Project's wider outreach programme, in January 2015 a free, drop-in Family Archaeology Day at RPM brought together 14 archaeological and heritage organisations (see acknowledgements) to run prehistoric themed displays and activities, with an emphasis on hands-on learning. 1883 visitors attended this event (124% above average visitor figures at the museum) (Orange et al. 2015). At the event, a number of objects from the Whitehawk archive were displayed to the public for the first time and RPM staff delivered several magic lantern shows (an early form of image projection) throughout the day, showing images of the 1930's excavation.

An important part of the archive programme was its reassessment by specialist staff from Archaeology South-East, UCL (ASE). This was the first reassessment of the entire archive since the material had been deposited in the 1930s. The reassessment established what remained of the original archive, brought its interpretation up to current standards and, with its repacking and cataloguing, consolidated the archive and provided a baseline for its future study. ASE specialists provided a series of seminars to disseminate initial findings of the reassessment process to the Project volunteers, and RPM hosted a public lecture in March 2015.

Looking to the future, a free download technical report detailing the results of the archive reassessment, geophysical survey and excavation (Sygrave et al 2015) will be available through the Project website (UCL 2015) and the online Archaeological Data Service by the end of 2015.

The archive work and reassessment is currently aiding a Ph.D candidate at the University of Winchester in her research on early Neolithic human remains, a University of Southampton Research Project on decorated artefacts from the British and Irish Neolithic, and a major new Natural History Museum (NHM) and UCL project looking at human adaptation to diet and infectious disease since 8,000 BCE (NHM 2015).

The Partnership is also currently arranging the ongoing management of the site with Brighton and Hove City Council, including the placing of interpretation boards on site. On-site interpretation is important so that local residents, race-goers and other visitors can continue to gain an enhanced awareness of the history and significance of the Camp, and to encourage respectful treatment of the site.

Research into the early British Neolithic has come a long way from the important early work undertaken by archaeologists such as Curwen. Through community archaeology engagement and the support of the HLF, we look forward to presenting the forthcoming articles and results of the assessment and shedding new light on the complexity of Early British Neolithic society.

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