

## Built Heritage

by Bob Davis, Anne Upson and Rosamund J. Cleal

### *Study of the Built Heritage Resource to Date*

In contrast to the considerable body of past investigation and recording of the important prehistoric landscape, previous study of the extant built heritage of the area has been modest. However, even some early visitors to the area, such as Stukeley, although initially drawn by the prehistoric monuments, were also aware of some of the buildings of the area, evidenced by his sketch of the gabled front of Avebury Manor of 1723 and by his many detailed drawings and plans, including highly detailed and apparently accurate representations of the village, which include ‘birds eye’ views of many of the houses, other buildings and infrastructure such as roads and tracks (see Ucko *et al.* 1991 for a study including many previously unpublished views).

It is only in recent decades that the study of the vernacular built heritage has been given the importance that it deserves. Even the iconic *Buildings of England* series is subject to the criticism that the first editions of its county volumes focused disproportionately on the churches and higher status buildings of each settlement, while confining mention of the local vernacular buildings to a general passage resulting from a ‘Perambulation’. In the edition of 1975 the only houses described in Avebury parish are Avebury and Trusloe Manors, West Kennett House, and Bannings and Westbrook farmhouses; only Avebury Manor is described at any length (Pevsner, revised Cherry 1975, 96–103, 564).

Due to its considerable national and international importance, the archaeological resource of the prehistoric to medieval periods within the WHS has been investigated and surveyed in detail, while the less significant remains of its post-medieval and modern past have not been subject of any comprehensive study. Conservation Area Statements prepared for Avebury and West Kennett Conservation Areas in 2003 provide the most comprehensive analysis of the surviving built heritage of the area to date.

### *The Designated Resource*

#### Listed Buildings

This heritage-rich and relatively unspoilt part of rural Wiltshire is well-represented on the *List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest*. The designated area contains a total of 82 Listed buildings, only four of which are listed at above Grade II. The higher grade buildings are all situated at the heart of the village of Avebury and comprise:



Plate 39 *The Dovecote, Avebury* (© Erica Gittins)

- Church of St James (Pl. 34) Grade I
- Avebury Manor (Pl. 35) Grade I
- Great Barn at Avebury Manor (Pl. 38) Grade I
- Dovecote at Avebury Manor (Pl. 39) Grade II\*

A total of 14 of the 82 Listed buildings are associated with Avebury Manor, and include the house, former stables, racquets court, garden walls, gates and statuary. Other built heritage ‘types’ well represented in the group of Listed buildings are farmhouses (6), other farm buildings (6), cottages (14), milestones (5) and boundary walls, gates and railings (18).

The vast majority of the Listed buildings are situated within one of the nucleated settlements; the notable exceptions being a series of milestones along the A4 and A361, and Down Barn Cottage in an isolated location on Overton Down. The village of Avebury has a total of 44 Listed buildings, Avebury Trusloe has nine, and Beckhampton and West Kennett have eight each.

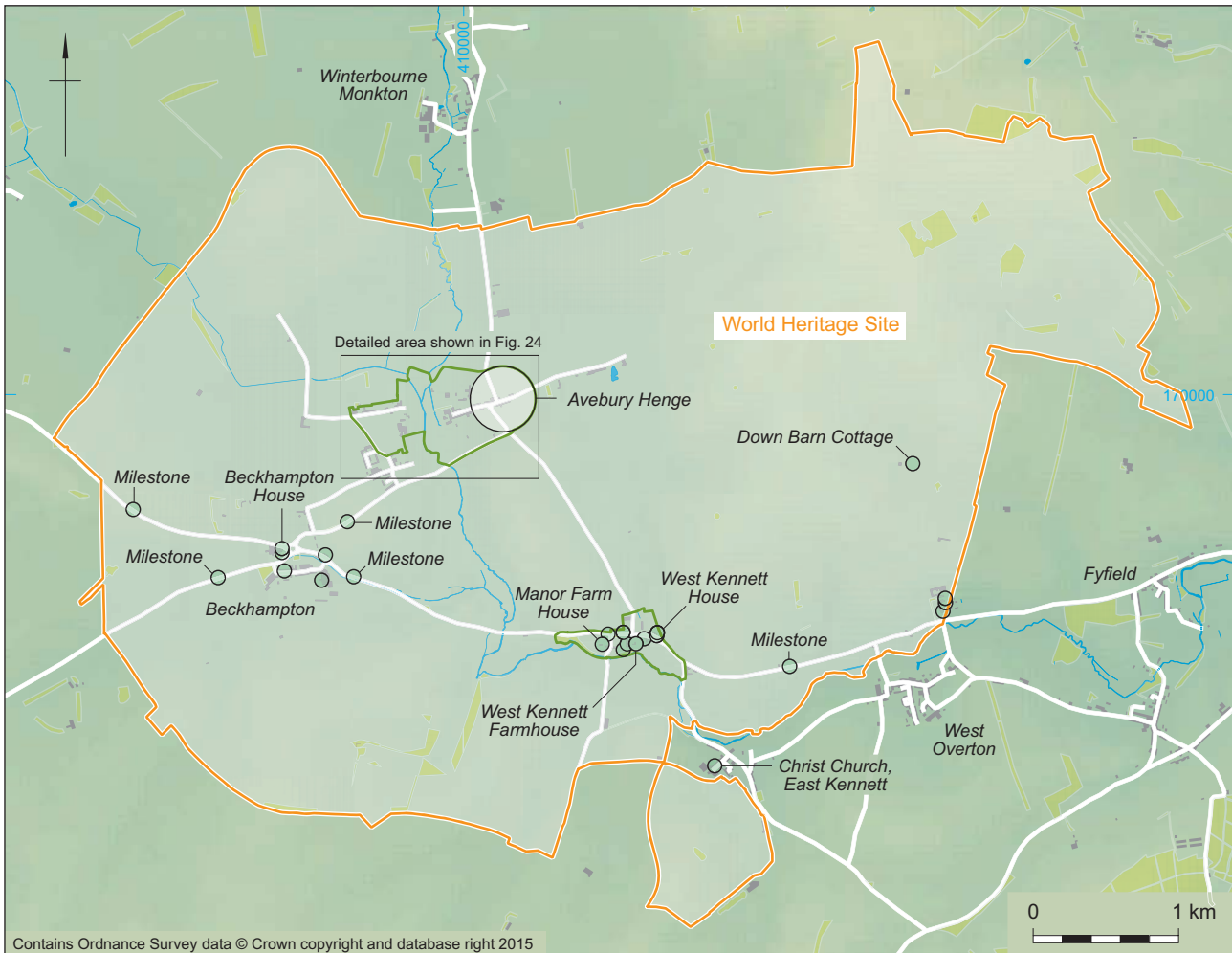


Figure 23 Listed buildings in the Avebury WHS

### Conservation Areas

The Avebury area of the WHS also contains two Conservation Areas: the settlements of Avebury and West Kennett, both of which were designated in 1975 (Fig. 24).

The Avebury Conservation Area includes the prehistoric circle, the entire village centre and lands to north and south, and extends westwards over the line of the River Kennet to include the northern part of Avebury Trusloe, including Trusloe Manor and the buildings along Bray Street. It also extends south to include Chapel Cottages on the edge of the later settlement core (Fig. 23).

The West Kennett Conservation Area includes Manor Farm and West Kennett Farm to the south of the A4, and West Kennett House and all other developed sites to the north of the main road (Fig. 24).

Both settlements contain a varied mix of architectural styles and materials, reflecting the range of locally available materials, and the utilisation of imported materials in later buildings. Conservation Area Statements have been prepared for both of these

areas, and provide a good level of information about the development of the built heritage, locally distinctive materials, and their deployment in different periods.

### Character of the Built Heritage

#### Settlement characterisation

The settlement pattern within the WHS is characterised by a small number of villages located in the Winterbourne and Kennet River valleys, and a few isolated farmsteads. The villages are traditionally of nucleated form, though in some cases this has been affected by later ribbon development along major routes.

The pattern of settlement has generally been dictated by the need for water and only the village of Avebury itself appears to have been sited deliberately in close association with the prehistoric monument. Even then, the village is also close to the Winterbourne which flows from north to south to the west of the village.

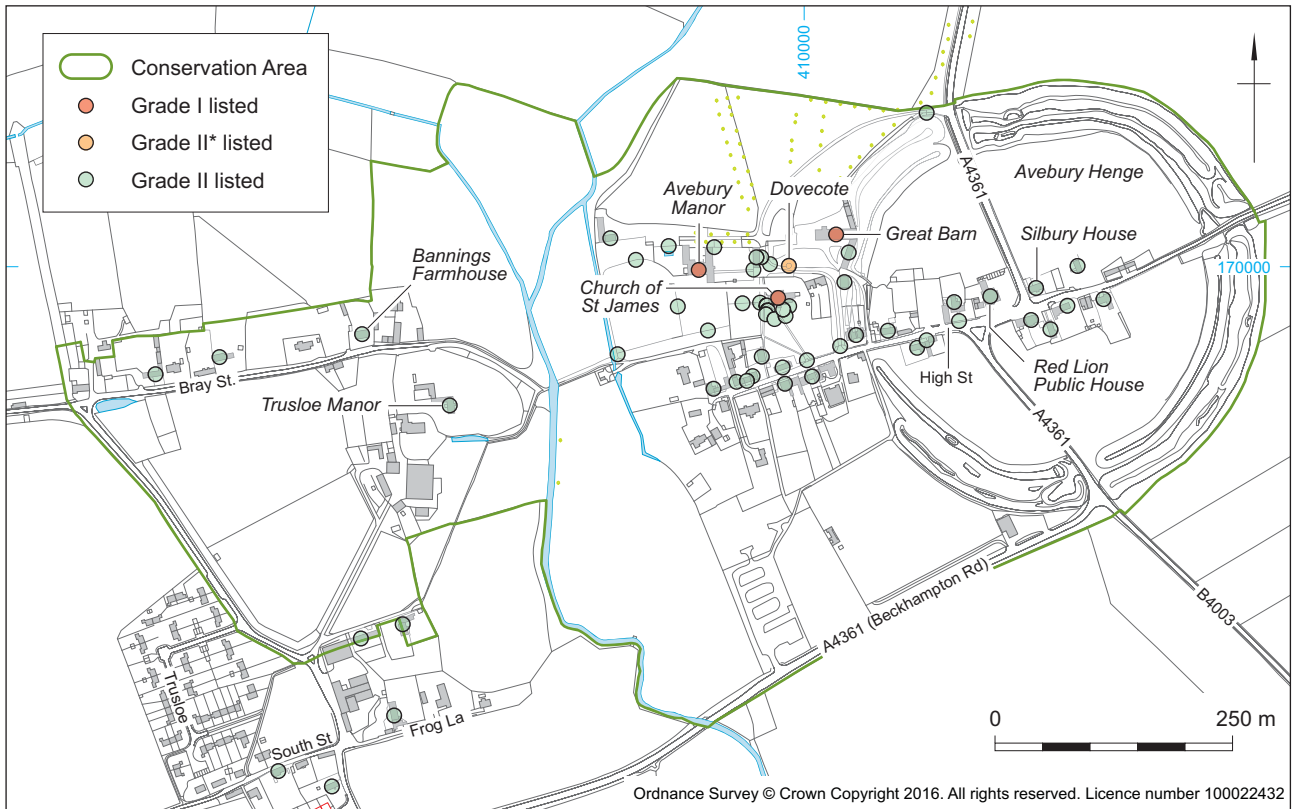


Figure 24 Listed buildings in Avebury and Avebury Trusloe

### Vernacular building

The vernacular built heritage resource is dominated by dwellings and farm buildings constructed from a variety of readily available and local materials. These predominantly include timber framing, sarsen and limestone, while flint, chalk and cob were also traditionally used. Lime has been the traditional bonding material and this has also added a distinctive character to the appearance of the area.

One of the most notable features of the built heritage of the area is the known use of components of the prehistoric stone circle and avenues to provide vernacular building materials. The process was well known, with some local families specialising in stone-breaking, which was also carried out by farmers. The tradition was described by Stukeley, with reference to specific local families, and demonstrates that this activity was carried out over a number of centuries up to and including the 18th century. This provides one of the most tangible links between the prehistoric monuments of the area and the built heritage (see Gillings *et al.* 2008 for a fuller description of stone breaking).

Traditional roofing was again generally typical of the southern region, with simple steep pitched roofs covered in thatch; in this case long straw wheat. Many examples of the traditional thatched roof (Pl. 40) covering still exist within the WHS, but examples of

the modern vernacular, dating to the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries demonstrate the availability of a greater range of materials such as plain tile and slate, giving the roofscapes of the various villages their existing diverse appearance. Traditional windows and doors are also typical of the southern region with mainly small timber framed casements used.

Surviving historic farm buildings contain timber framing of both oak and elm and are also built to regional plan types such as rectangular threshing barns, cart sheds and stables. However, no extensive survey has been made of the plan form and layout of farm complexes within the WHS. Farm buildings in the area reflect the many agricultural improvements imposed by government and fashion and show the characteristic expansion of farm yards and buildings required to keep pace with the needs of agriculture. Together with surviving examples of traditional farm buildings, there are numerous examples of more modern and functional buildings alongside. There is also a predominance of modern external cladding to barns (Pl. 41) and this includes timber weatherboarding and corrugated metal and asbestos sheet.

Whilst the farms have been the subject of major changes and expansions the individual houses of the nucleated settlements retain their traditional form and are generally set within their well-defined



*Plate 40 Traditional thatched roof, South Street, Avebury Trusloe (© Erica Gittins)*



*Plate 41 Modern agricultural buildings, Avebury Trusloe (© Erica Gittins)*



Plate 42 *United Reformed Church, Green Street, Avebury* (© Erica Gittins)

enclosures or boundaries. The dwellings are characterised by typically modest one- and two-storey cottages built to a post-medieval rectangular plan form with end or central chimney stacks.

There are also examples of 19th-century estate buildings in Avebury and the surrounding area which provide a distinctive and recognisable stylistic element to the built heritage, and also reflect the changing land ownership of the area. The rest of the built resource is typified by pre-fabricated farm buildings and modern houses, including local authority stock, which form part the modern element of the settlements.

### **Gentry-owned houses**

A number of houses within the WHS were built or developed by gentry families and were used, in some cases only occasionally, by those families. Avebury Manor is the largest of these, and appears to have been built or rebuilt in the mid-16th century, considerably enlarged around 1600, enhanced internally in the first half of the 18th century and substantially restored and enlarged in the early 20th

century (Treasure 1991; Upson with Davis 2011). Smaller examples are found at Avebury Trusloe, Beckhampton, East Kennett and West Kennett and this architecture is represented in all of the settlements as well as being located along the main east-west A4 road.

Stylistically these buildings range in date from the 16th century to the 18th and 19th century, and those earlier houses, such as Avebury Manor, demonstrate architecture of successive periods through their incremental extension and embellishment. The quality of this architecture is partly a reflection of traditional styles mixed with modern design and the availability of materials. The 18th and 19th centuries saw significant advances in both design and materials. The Avebury WHS has excellent examples of these types of buildings. Architectural features such as sash windows and slate-covered low pitched roofs together with rendered exteriors and brick elevations are all well represented. Landscaped formal gardens have been laid out and in many cases their proportions maintained by historical boundaries.



Plate 43 Iron railings on low stone brick walls, High Street, Avebury (© Erica Gittins)

### Christian foundations

Christian foundations are also represented within the WHS. The site on which Avebury Manor and Garden stands was that of a Benedictine alien cell, but no certain tangible remains of this survive (an example of possibly *in situ* pre-16th-century stonework mentioned by Sir Francis Knowles as found during his work on the house (Knowles 1958, 360) cannot now be identified although it is possible that it is buried under a small area of late 20th-century render). St James Church at Avebury has origins in the Saxon period with later Norman and post-medieval additions and alterations (see Anglo-Saxon and Medieval section, above). The Nonconformist movement is also represented in Avebury by the United Reformed Church (Pl. 42) in Green Street. Material used in the fabric of St James includes flint, sarsen, limestone and brick, largely reflecting and maintaining the local character, while the roofing material is largely slate.

### Boundary features

As a result of the modern expansion of farming techniques in the area, the overriding impression of the open landscape field boundaries is of modern fencing such as post and wire. The more established boundaries, particularly within and around the settlements, demonstrate the local vernacular of the area with a variety of materials and styles employed. These include, most notably, rendered cob on sarsen footings with traditional thatched, stone and clay tile copings. These are mainly employed around farmyard enclosures and domestic property boundaries, and a

particularly notable example is the thatched sarsen wall around Truslowe Manor. Avebury Manor Old Farmyard also includes an unusual example of an inscription in sarsen, on the boundary wall between the 'Plough Way' or South Drive and the farmyard. A large sarsen within the wall is inscribed 'Sr AW Kt 1797', Sir Adam Williamson being at that time the owner of Avebury Manor, recently returned from the West Indies.

The significance and quality of boundary features within the WHS is demonstrated by their inclusion on the statutory list. There are a total of 18 Listed hard landscape features within the WHS, including walls, gates and railings, as well as the very locally distinctive drainage channels using sarsen setts along the High Street in Avebury village. Iron railings set on low stone (Pl. 43), and later brick walls, are a particular feature of Avebury village, and survive in association with quite modest houses. A local anecdote records that the survival of iron railings at Avebury Manor, and perhaps elsewhere in the village, during the metal-collections of World War II, was due to the refusal of Alexander Keiller, the then owner of Avebury Manor, to allow them to be taken, but there appears to be no documentation to support this.

### Milestones

Features relating to transport also add distinctiveness to the local scene. Avebury was at the centre of an important east-west cross roads for many years. By the late 18th century the popularity of Bath to the west was at its height and the road to the west was improved by this time. Traditional roadside coaching

inns are represented within the area, and a group of five listed milestones relating to the 18th-century turnpikes survive.

### Street furniture

Street furniture is chiefly represented by period telephone and Royal Mail post boxes (Pl. 44). These traditional red features, once taken for granted within the English village, are now becoming a rarity. The World Heritage status of the Avebury area has helped to preserve these iconic items and they continue to form an important part of the streetscape.

### Military

There is little or no evidence of specific military features within the WHS. However, there are features relating to the Second World War period located just outside the WHS area to the west. These features principally relate to the abandoned RAF airfield at Yatesbury and include hangars, buildings and defensive structures such as pill boxes. A single post-Second World War Royal Observer's post survives on Waden Hill.

## Period Summaries

### Saxon and Medieval

The Church of St James, Avebury, dates from the 10th century, with alterations in the 12th and subsequent centuries up to the 15th. The nave is Anglo-Saxon, with 15th-century aisles replacing late 12th-century narrower ones, and a 13th-century chancel.

While this is the only known extant built fabric of the period within the Avebury area of the WHS, there is considerable further evidence of contemporary building in the form of complex earthworks, including building platforms, especially to either side of the River Kennet between Avebury Manor and Trusloe Manor. A hollow-way running north through Avebury Manor Park may represent an early extension of settlement in that direction.

### 16th century

A small group of buildings date securely to the 16th century:

- Avebury Manor (Pl. 35)
- Avebury Trusloe Manor
- Dovecote at Avebury Manor (Pl. 39)

While a further two date to the late 16th/early 17th century:

- Dovecote at West Kennett Farm
- Red Lion Public House (formerly a farmhouse), Avebury (Pl. 45)



Plate 44 Royal Mail post box, Avebury Trusloe  
(© Erica Gittins)

The 16th-century east range of Avebury Manor, its dovecote, and the surviving elements of Trusloe Manor are all constructed of the local sarsen rubble – the former rendered, the second previously rendered, and the last lined with chalkstone – and all have stone slate roofs. The dovecote at West Kennett Farm is also of sarsen, and the central early range of the Red Lion is of rendered sarsen rubble. Due to the very hard and unworkable nature of the sarsen rubble, most quoins and all dressings were of limestone or chalkstone.

### 17th century

Fourteen of the listed buildings within the area date to the 17th century, and another three to the late 17th/early 18th century. It is to be assumed that any building of this date, which survives in anything like authentic condition, will be Listed and therefore a considerable amount of information about this period of building is available through listing descriptions. However, the descriptions written some decades ago were regularly prepared from an external inspection



Plate 45 *The Red Lion, Avebury* (© Erica Gittins)

only, leaving a considerable proportion of the evidence untapped.

The majority of the Listed buildings of this date are cottages; regularly found in pairs or short linear ranges, and are of low, linear proportions, with first floor windows immediately below the eaves. Many retain their thatched roofs, which would originally have been ubiquitous and of long straw wheat. Dormers are not a feature of this period of cottage, and ‘eyebrows’ in the eaves line are very rare.

Three Listed farmhouses also date to this period – Manor Farm House and West Kennett Farmhouse in West Kennett, and Westbrook Farmhouse in Avebury Trusloe. Although Westbrook Farmhouse is thatched, the other two have plain tile roofs.

These 17th-century farmhouses and cottages are almost exclusively built of sarsen rubble, though in the case of West Kennett Farmhouse, the sarsen has been squared and coursed. Some of the higher status dwellings have limestone or brick dressings, while many of the cottages have been colour- or white-washed. While the majority of buildings of this date were of sarsen, a small number of cottages introduced brick to the local scene.

Another notable building dating to this period is the Barn which was originally part of Avebury Manor Farm and is now part of the National Trust’s ‘Old Farmyard’ area. This large, nine-bay thatched, aisled barn is of timber frame with weatherboarding set on

stone dwarf walls and is nationally a relatively rare and therefore significant survival of this date.

Dendrochronology has dated some of the principal timbers to a felling date of around 1300, with the timbers representing at least two previous buildings, one probably an aisled barn, and one a cruck building (of which two partial blades survive). The majority of the Barn is in elm, and documentary sources record it as ‘New Barn’ in 1695.

Developments which may be classed as part of the built heritage in the sense that they involve considerable construction include the creation or ‘floating’ of watermeadows within the WHS. There are extant traces of at least one carrier alongside the Winterbourne north of New Bridge and the 1924 edition of the Ordnance Survey map of the area shows an aqueduct crossing the Winterbourne just upstream of the bridge. Water is shown at least along one stretch of the carrier in a plan of Avebury Manor of 1695 (Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre), indicating that much of the system was in place by then. The OS map of 1924 seems to show a fairly simple system, probably with overbank flooding from the carrier.

Water meadows were established quite early in Wiltshire and it is entirely likely that a system was operating in the Avebury area before the end of the 17th century, but there is also some indication that systems were being used and maintained into the late 18th century.



### 18th century

By far the majority of the Listed buildings within the Avebury WHS area date to the 18th century. This period includes the listed milestones, a number of monuments in St James' churchyard, and several hard landscape features including boundary walls, gates and railings.

The domestic buildings of this period begin to demonstrate to a greater degree the use of imported materials, in particular brick and plain tile. A number of fine houses displaying high quality brickwork, such as Bannings Farmhouse, West Kennett House, Beckhampton House and Silbury House were built during this period. In Avebury, some fine 18th-century houses were built along the High Street. These buildings were not subject to the 20th-century clearance activities, and therefore the built heritage character of the High Street within the monument is disproportionately of this type of property.

Although still often related to the agricultural economy, these houses display reference to the national fashions in building of their day, made possible by access to a greater range of non-indigenous building materials. The houses became taller, with more generous floor to ceiling heights, and with habitable attic spaces over two principal floors such as at Bannings Farmhouse, and even three principal floors at West Kennett House. The construction of these houses introduced a mix of materials and variety of building forms and architectural detail which characterises the area today.

A number of farm buildings dating to this period also survive. Whilst most of these would traditionally have been timber-framed and weatherboarded with thatched roofs, a small but significant group of stone-built farm buildings also survives, most notably those belonging to Avebury Manor Farm.

The 18th century also saw the establishment of one of the very few industries within the area, evidenced by reference to a malthouse on the lands of West Kennett Farm in 1745.

At least one structure in the landscape, a small but elegant brick-built bridge over the Winterbourne from Waden Hill to Silbury Meadow appears to have been built in 1793/4 as part of the arrangements for enclosure and at least in part financed as part of the process, as documented in correspondence between Richard Hickley, steward to the owners of Avebury Manor, and the owners, Anne and Adam Williamson (Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre 184/7).

### 19th and 20th centuries

New development in the area during the 19th century appears to have been relatively modest, though the century did see the growth of another of the very few industries in the area – George Butler's Brewery, with



*Plate 46 20th-century housing in Avebury Trusloe  
(© Erica Gittins)*

buildings on both sides of the main road through West Kennett and associated worker's cottages.

At least one building, known in the late 20th/early 21st centuries as 'Avebury Antiques' still carries the traces of an advertising sign on its western gable end, advertising 'Perry's Hotel', an important village business through much of the 20th century. Other industries, including Titcombe carpenters, a butcher's, a baker's and a rope walk, have left no visible traces externally. Rawlins Garage, which stood in the early 20th century adjacent to the Cove stones, was moved in the 1930s to a site just outside the circle, partly funded by Alexander Keiller, and was finally demolished in the early 21st century by the then owners.

One of the most notable impacts on the built heritage of Avebury was that instigated by Alexander Keiller in the 1930s. His ambitious programme of works to improve the understanding and condition of the stone circle led to a move to reduce the number of buildings within the monument, although demolitions by Alexander Keiller were a very minor element in the eventual removal of a number of buildings. Documentation in the Alexander Keiller Museum – principally an annotated map – shows that most removals and demolition took place during the 1950s when a large part of the site was in National Trust ownership and the Ministry of Works supported this work. The demolitions took place alongside the development of alternative housing at Avebury Trusloe to the west (Pl. 46), establishing the 20th-century character of the southern part of that detached settlement.

## Modern Avebury

by *Ronald Hutton*

In 1800 Avebury was essentially a village with a prehistoric monument somewhat awkwardly dispersed through it. In 2000 it was a World Heritage Site formed around a prehistoric monument, with a village somewhat awkwardly tacked onto it: and in the contrast lies the best and the worst of its modern history, and most of the opportunities and problems that characterise it at the present day.

Scholarly publications on the monument continued to appear through the 19th century as they had through the 18th, but in larger quantity and with a return to the conflict of opinion which had marked attitudes to it before 1740. Certainly the orthodoxy was still that established by William Stukeley – that monuments like the Avebury complex had been built by the Druids – but within this model many different permutations were possible. Thus, Thomas Maurice in 1801 thought the Avebury henge to be an astronomical observatory; William Lisle Bowles in 1828 made it a calendar and temple of the Gaulish god Teutates as well; Edward Duke in 1846 found it to be a planetarium and in 1857 J. M. Kemble pronounced it to be a cemetery. At the same time the Druidic interpretation became challenged once more. In 1823 Henry Browne declared that it was a memorial to the events in the Garden of Eden, raised by Adam himself. Longer-lived and more influential was a school of thought which arose in the middle of the century and returned to the medieval idea that megalithic monuments were post-Roman. The first major exponent of this theory was Algernon Herbert in 1849, but the best-known and most prolific was James Fergusson, who between 1860 and 1872 made the Avebury henge into a memorial to the British war dead in the struggle against the invading Anglo-Saxons.

Meanwhile the villagers continued quietly going about their daily lives, which at times occasioned the destruction of more of the monument. In 1812 Sir Richard Colt Hoare had the site surveyed for the first time since Stukeley's day, and found that a dozen more stones had vanished since then, leaving only 17 in place. During the following two decades, tenant farmers broke up two fallen megaliths and a landowner directed the removal of three stones of the northern inner circle which obstructed cultivation of his property. Between 1841 and 1871 the population of the settlement virtually doubled, so that it pressed ever harder on the ancient remains. Small wonder that visiting antiquaries began to refer to the village as a whole with resentment or concern, Joseph Hunter calling it a 'vile hamlet' in 1829 and Sir John Lubbock

a 'beautiful parasite' in 1865. Lubbock was one of the greatest of Victorian scholars, the one who first applied Darwin's new concept of human evolution to the study of the ancient European past, and introduced a large reading public to the model of a European prehistory severed from Biblical narratives and divided progressively into the Palaeolithic, Neolithic, Bronze Age and Iron Age. He also inaugurated a new epoch in the history of Avebury, by intervening in 1872 when land containing some of the remaining stones was offered for sale as a potential housing development. Lubbock bought some himself, to block construction, and thereafter lobbied for the passage of the first national legislation to protect ancient monuments in 1882, which included the henge, the surviving part of the West Kennet Avenue, the two Longstones and Silbury Hill in its schedule. Lubbock's affection for the place was signalled when he was subsequently awarded a peerage, and took the title of Baron Avebury, which is still held by his family.

Having secured the safety of the complex, the next step to be taken by modern scholarship was to commence systematic investigation of it. A trial excavation was made in 1865 to 1867, which merely confirmed that it was not a cemetery, and a thorough survey added in 1881 which detected many buried stones. In 1899 the British Association for the Advancement of Science formed a committee to settle the age of stone circles, and this commissioned a more ambitious programme of exploration at the henge. It was entrusted to the curator of the Taunton Museum, Harold St George Gray, who had learned the most advanced archaeological techniques of the time from their pioneer, General Pitt Rivers. He applied them well at Avebury, directing a team of diggers there at periods between 1908 and 1922 which focused on the ditch and bank which promised the best evidence for a date of construction. This was arguably to prove the most important single excavation at the henge thus far, because it established, once and for all, that the monument belonged to the Neolithic. Gray's work proceeded without any discernible disturbance of the village, and indeed provided some benefit to it, although not of a kind which he himself desired: he left open one of his ditch cuttings for eight years to discover how quickly it filled with earth, and returned to find that local people had dumped several tons of domestic rubbish in it instead.

After the process of study was well advanced, a parallel scholarly enterprise, that of reconstruction, could commence. In 1911 'Adam', the surviving megalith of the Longstones Cove, fell over, and the Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society

decided to re-erect it, and followed this by putting up a stone in the West Kennet Avenue which had toppled in 1899. Such work was continued on a grand scale in the 1930s, and at the behest of a personality who arguably ranks with Stukeley as one of the two most colourful and influential yet associated with the henge: Alexander Keiller. He was born rich, the heir to a fortune made in the manufacture of Dundee marmalade, and equipped with enormous energy, confidence, curiosity, aggression and libido. His enthusiasms embraced some of the traditional pastimes of the wealthy, such as grouse-shooting, but more that were distinctively a creation of the 20th century, including fast cars and skiing. Fortunately, the latter category also included archaeology, in which he displayed his general love of novelty and innovation. He was first attracted to it in 1922 by reading in a newspaper of O. G. S. Crawford's pioneering work in the use of aerial photography to identify ancient sites, and offered to sponsor this. Two years later, Crawford drew his attention to a scheme to erect a radio mast on Windmill Hill, where signs of extensive prehistoric occupation had been noted. Keiller purchased some of the land (although by the time he did so the radio mast scheme had been abandoned) and this allowed him to pay for a major excavation, which revealed a Neolithic causewayed enclosure and such a rich assemblage of bones and artefacts that it became regarded as the definitive site for the main Early Neolithic culture of southern Britain, throughout the mid-20th century. Keiller was personally responsible for introducing practices of sectioning of ground and general retention of finds which were in advance of even most reputable contemporary archaeologists.

He also had to reckon with two problems in the process. The first was the immediate suspicion and hostility of the county's existing experts in prehistory, assembled in the Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society, and above all Maud and Benjamin Cunnington, who had earlier re-erected the fallen stones described above. Crawford brokered a deal whereby they allowed the Windmill Hill excavation if Gray were brought back to supervise it. In 1927 Gray withdrew, or was pushed out, and Keiller took over directly, only to hit his second problem, a car crash in 1929 which left him incapable of the work. Meanwhile his antipathy towards the Cunningtons had remained as powerful, and as fully reciprocated, as before, and provoked Maud to compete with him by locating and excavating the site of the Sanctuary, an undoubted service to scholarship, although her methods were well below Keiller's standards. Keiller himself responded to both setbacks by turning his attention to the Avebury

complex itself, hiring one of the finest archaeologists of the rising generation, Stuart Piggott. Piggott suggested an excavation of the section of the West Kennet Avenue nearest to the henge, but it seems to have been Keiller himself who now decided to buy the chunk of avenue outright, and with it the whole henge, and to re-erect fallen stones and repair and set up broken stones, in order to restore as much of the complex as was possible. The section of avenue was the first part of the complex to be given this treatment, in 1934–5, with dramatic effect: only three of its megaliths were still standing, but Keiller put up nine more that had fallen and 13 which had been buried, and set concrete markers on the sites of those completely lost, to give a sense of the whole monument. For the rest of the decade he applied the same treatment to the henge, restoring all that could be located of the megaliths of the outer circle, for more than half of its circuit, and the southern inner circle. Some startling incidental discoveries were made, such as the body of the 'barber-surgeon', and the complex was turned back into a much more spectacular monument. He managed to do this, moreover, without alienating the villagers. He was a good landlord, providing employment, buying drinks regularly and playing a full part in the social world of the community. He demolished a few modern buildings as part of his restoration of the prehistoric site, but the only one not already derelict at the time was a garage which he rebuilt handsomely outside the earthwork. He served both scholarship and the public by establishing a museum to house the finds from his excavations, and, though his perfectionism prevented him from publishing the results of those, they were well recorded enough to be brought into print by Isobel Smith in 1965.

The one, fatal, flaw in his plan was that even he could not afford it. In 1941 his fortune began to collapse, after he had spent the equivalent of £2,500,000 in current money on reconstructing the henge. He gave up the grand design with almost half of it incomplete, and with it any further interest in Avebury. In 1943 he sold all his land there to the National Trust for its agricultural value alone, bearing permanently himself the full cost of all his restoration work. The Trust thus found itself in charge of what he had turned back into one of the world's most impressive prehistoric structures, just at the moment at which the increase in private motor transport allowed it to become a major tourist attraction. In an important sense, Keiller had transformed the henge from being the concern of people with a special interest in prehistory to one of the iconic sites of ancient Britain. It suddenly became prominent in every textbook on the subject, and the National Trust



*Plate 47 The reconstructed West Kennet Long Barrow (© Erica Gittins)*

and the government's Ministry of Works set about, in parallel, developing it further for this changed role. Some of this process was destructive: the Trust went much further during its first 20 years of ownership than Keiller had done, in demolishing parts of the village and relocating the inhabitants in order to open up spaces around the megaliths. It removed several buildings in good repair and some of historic value, such as a row of 18th-century cottages, transplanting the inhabitants to a new housing development at Avebury Trusloe. The most constructive aspect of the work consisted of developing a selection of sites around the henge to make up a package with it which could be offered to visitors as the best representative sample of Neolithic ceremonial structures in England.

This was carried out by the Ministry, and a portfolio of four satellite attractions resulted, each taken directly into Government care and conserved by it, with footpaths, signposts and interpretative panels set up for tourists. Windmill Hill and Silbury Hill were two of these, and a third was the Sanctuary, where nothing had survived above ground since the 1720s but concrete blocks were installed to mark both the positions of the stone circles and of the timber posts which preceded them. The result, based on Maud Cunnington's interpretation, was to give a deceptive impression of four coherent stages of construction including two roofed buildings – corrected by Mike Pitts's re-excavation at the end of

the century – but it made a vanished monument seem imposing and meaningful. The fourth satellite monument was to become the most exciting for many visitors. It was created after 1955–6, when Stuart Piggott, by now probably the leading British expert on the Neolithic, supervised the thorough re-excavation of one of the largest long barrows still visible in the district, that above West Kennet. It proved to be a transepted gallery grave, the most elaborate and impressive kind of stone-chambered barrow, with chambers of unusual size even for the kind. After the dig was complete, the Ministry restored them carefully, with deft additions of concrete, gravel and Perspex (Pl. 47), as a tourist attraction. The alteration in the site's reputation was striking: before the mid-1950s it does not feature in the guides to English prehistoric monuments, while thereafter it was the most famous, and frequently visited, long barrow of all. Although a thoroughly exceptional specimen of a rare variety of this class of structure, it has come to be the type one for very many people. When it had taken its place on the visitor trail, the latter was essentially complete, and all that was needed to activate it was a comprehensive, learned and accessibly-written official guide book, which was duly provided in 1959 by Richard Atkinson (1959), who stood second only to Piggott as an expert in the Neolithic of England.

The odd one out in the assemblage of 'honey-pot' monuments was Silbury, which had not undergone

any 20th-century excavation and whose purpose remained a complete enigma. In 1969 Atkinson therefore took it on, with ample funding accompanied by maximum media exposure, resulting in a two-year programme to bore a tunnel laterally through to the core, reported stage by stage on national television. The result was an anticlimax, and perhaps a disaster. No spectacular discoveries were made to satisfy the viewing public, and the mound remained almost as much an enigma as before. It was confirmed that no remains of a burial or of chambers existed in the centre, but that was also the conclusion drawn by antiquaries who had dug a shaft in 1776 and a tunnel in 1849. For a time it was believed that Atkinson's 'Silbury Dig' had still yielded important information, but it never received proper publication and was superseded by a much more effective if less publicity-conscious excavation in the 2000s. Its most important and least expected result was, perhaps, to inspire a lecturer in art history, Michael Dames, to offer his own, fluent and confident, interpretation of the hill. In 1976 he suggested that it represented the body of a great mother goddess, the empowering spirit of the earth, who had been the paramount deity of the European Neolithic (Dames 1976). The concept of such a deity had been orthodoxy among archaeologists themselves in the 1950s, having grown up slowly during the century before then. Ironically, it had been abandoned by them over the 10 years before Dames published, for lack of any unequivocal supporting evidence, but he was apparently unaware of this, and proceeded to link the cult of this presumed being with both Silbury and a nearby spring, at Swallowhead, which had hitherto not featured as significant in accounts of local prehistory. The success of his book inspired him to publish another, in 1977, which combined the Avebury henge with Silbury, the West Kennet long barrow and the Sanctuary as the focal points of a cycle of festivals, based on the opening of the seasons, which united all four monuments in one religious system.

What Dames had done, of course, was to impose an imagined ancient festive system on sites picked out by the Ministry of Works in the mid-20th century as its sample for tourist consumption. Archaeologically, his cycle did not work, because it put together monuments from different millennia, such as the henge and the long barrow, and ignored the western parts of the complex, such as the Longstones. His interpretation of Silbury, on the other hand, remains feasible, but only as one among many others. Such considerations are largely beside the point of his true significance, which was to open up Avebury as a focus for modern spirituality, and especially that associated with Paganism, the earth mysteries movement and the Goddess movement, three cultural phenomena which appeared in Britain between 1950 and 1980.



Plate 48 Offerings in the rag tree at Swallowhead Spring (© Erica Gittins)

All were associated with radical counter-cultures, and all drew on that yearning for a reconnection with the natural world and with former inhabitants of one's land which was one result of the dislocation produced by industrialisation and urbanisation in the Western world. Dames had provided these groups with a festive cycle which spoke to those needs and could be celebrated in the monuments so helpfully restored and opened to the public since 1930. In particular, his interpretation of Silbury as a representation of a great goddess made a natural appeal to the Goddess movement, a religious wing of American feminism which arrived in Britain in the 1970s. He turned the hill into a site for its rituals, and made the Swallowhead Spring another (Pl. 48). Henceforth, management of the Avebury complex had to reckon with a fourth interest group, to join the villagers who had been there for over a millennium, the scholars who had arrived in the 17th century and the tourists who had begun to appear in numbers during the mid-20th century: practitioners of forms of newly-evolved religion who regarded prehistoric remains as their sacred sites.

Archaeological investigation remained vibrant and very productive: indeed, excavations were conducted



Plate 49 *The Henge Shop, Avebury* (© Erica Gittins)

in or around Avebury in every decade of the 20th century except the 1940s, and continued into the 21st century. Since 1980, four stand out as especially noteworthy, the first being the investigation of outlying sites led by Alasdair Whittle in the years around 1990, the greatest discovery of which was the pair of palisaded Late Neolithic enclosures at West Kennett, used for assemblies which included feasting. This added a major, and hitherto unsuspected, component to the complex. The second was Mike Pitt's re-examination of The Sanctuary in the 1990s, which revealed that the stone circles had been preceded not by a sequence of timber buildings but by a succession of pits and posts, which were renewed at intervals ad hoc. The Longstones Project of the late 1990s and early 2000s, which included Joshua Pollard and Mark Gillings, proved the existence of the Beckhampton Avenue and Cove and added to knowledge of the West Kennet Avenue and Avebury Cove. Finally, the sudden collapse of the 18th-century shaft through Silbury Hill, on the 29 May, 2000, enforced repairs which allowed a more thorough examination of the mound led by Jim Leary and David Field. This established the long sequence of construction, involving successive changes of plan, which eventually resulted in its permanent form. In 1986, of course, the set of protected and conserved monuments and their landscape at Avebury was

designated a World Heritage Site by the United Nations, coupled with Stonehenge and its environs (see *Introduction*).

None of these important accretions of knowledge, however, resulted in any addition to the sites offered to visitors. They were duly incorporated into the latest guidebook to the henge, issued by the National Trust in 2008, and into the display of information on the Avebury monuments established in the 2000s in the Great Barn near the museum. In sharp contrast to the policy of the mid-20th century, however, no attempt was made to add the sites investigated to the tourist landscape. The West Kennet palisade enclosures remain as invisible as they were before their discovery, with no concrete markers and signboards to indicate their position. The Longstones Project found a number of buried megaliths along the line of the Beckhampton Avenue, but there is neither the funding nor the willpower available to re-erect them or any of those still lying beneath the ground within the henge. An early 21st-century system of interpretation is therefore resting rather uneasily upon a mid-20th-century set of conserved monuments. Indeed, access to those has diminished rather than increased. Silbury was climbed by local people, sometimes on annual festive occasions, for centuries, and during the middle of the 20th century it was still accessible to visitors. The swelling numbers of those,

however, meant that from the 1970s it was barred off with ever greater care, and treated as an attraction to be viewed from a distance. The growing press of people in the West Kennet long barrow produced sporadic proposals to close it, happily not implemented to date; while sections of the henge bank at Avebury were showing serious signs of erosion by the 1990s, and needing closure to allow regeneration of soil. In that decade the henge had begun to attract more than half a million visitors a year, a number which represented the absolute maximum that it could sustain without serious levels of damage. A crisis was averted by the simple and brutal tactics of making the parking of visitors' vehicles both more restricted and more expensive; but the problem has not wholly gone away.

The strain upon the monuments was accompanied, of course, by a growing one upon the village, which was a compound of three different, but converging, developments. The first was the obvious drawback of living in a growing major tourist attraction: of having strangers present in one's neighbourhood throughout the year and crowding it during the holiday season. This popularity did not rescue it from the second development, the general decline of facilities which beset rural England in the late 20th century, as local employment dwindled and commuting became a norm for residents. Businesses which could cash in on the tourist boom did well, such as the pub, and the café which opened opposite the museum in 1984. So did shops selling commodities related to the prehistoric heritage (Pl. 49). Those which provided the necessities of life, however, almost all closed down, along with the social and sports clubs and the school. The National Trust is now the main employer. These losses did not prevent the third pressure on the community, of a steep rise in property values as wealthy outsiders, attracted by the prospect of living within a spectacular ancient landscape, increasingly bought up the houses. For a southern English village at the present time, Avebury remains unusually prosperous, and campaigns of local opposition have seen off some of the worst threats of tourist development, such as a grand hotel complex and a theme park. Even so, the inhabitants prepared to chat with a stranger have tended to express a sense of unease and grievance.

If those expressions are rooted in general social and economic changes, their largest single focus at the end of the 2000s was often on the specific problems created by forms of avant-garde spirituality. It should be stressed that practitioners of these represent only an extreme distillation of a very widespread popular tendency to regard the complex of monuments as places of mystery (which is justified in that we still have no access to the belief system which inspired their construction or the rites enacted there), possibly



*Plate 50 Contemporary activity in and around West Kennet Long Barrow (© Erica Gittins)*

associated with arcane forces. At the time at which Michael Dames was starting to reactivate it as a place for pagan worship, in 1976, Harlech Television screened a series entitled *The Children of the Stones*, set in a fictional village which was Avebury in all but name and investing its prehistoric remains with occult forces, including the earth energies so dear to the earth mysteries movement. This attracted a large viewing public, and certainly enhanced the henge's reputation as a place on the tourist trail. During the 1970s and 1980s, counter-cultural religious activity tended to focus on Silbury, the Swallowhead Spring and the West Kennet long barrow (Pl. 50), following Dames's books, but in the 1990s it entered the henge itself. This was largely because of the banning, in 1985, of the midsummer rites at Stonehenge, which modern Druids had held for most of the 20th century and which had been accompanied by a pop festival since 1974. In 1993 one of the most colourful and visionary characters among Druid chiefs, Tim Sebastian, began to hold regular ceremonies within the Avebury circle, which settled thereafter into eight gatherings a year, at the festivals observed by modern Pagans. Many different Druid orders engaged in these, and hundreds of people attended them from a spectrum of Pagan traditions: in effect, they provided a full range of religious facilities, within a Pagan milieu, including seasonal rites, weddings and child-namings. Some of the celebrants camped locally, and not all of these treated the environment and

monuments with care, resulting in moments of tension with the guardians of both.

These eased in the later 1990s, as the huge groups who had joined together in the eight annual assemblies divided into different factions celebrating in parallel, and as the small element of bad behaviour more or less disappeared. None the less, some villagers remain unhappy with the element of noise and intrusion at the Pagan festivals. This problem was enhanced once more in the new century, ironically as a result of the reopening of Stonehenge for midsummer festivity and ritual. The very large numbers which subsequently celebrated there discouraged some people from further attendance, and they began to observe the night and dawn of the summer solstice in the quieter, larger and less heavily policed setting of the Avebury henge itself. By 2010 several hundred people were doing so in a carnival atmosphere of drumming, dancing, street theatre, bullroarers and other boisterous entertainments. The police were attempting to control the numbers attending by preventing car-parking in the area on that evening, and many villagers were arranging to stay elsewhere in order to get any sleep. Like the issue of overall visitor numbers, that of use of the monuments by religious groups teeters on the brink of the unsupportable.

In view of all this, it needs to be emphasised how harmoniously and effectively the WHS has been

managed since its establishment. Responsibilities are complex: the henge, the West Kennet Avenue, Windmill Hill, Silbury Hill, The Sanctuary and West Kennet long barrow are in State guardianship and therefore under the control of English Heritage, along with the Alexander Keiller Museum (Stables building) and most of the collections. Local Management Agreements and a Local Management and Loan Agreement are in place between English Heritage and the National Trust for all of the above except Silbury Hill, which is directly managed by English Heritage. The ownership of these guardianship monuments is yet more complicated – some are owned by the National Trust, some by the State and some by private owners. Wiltshire Council also has a role to play, not least since the main road between Swindon and Devizes still twists through the centre of the henge, and is the Council's responsibility. It can therefore be considered a considerable achievement that all have thus far managed to work together, and in the process to balance the wishes and needs of villagers, archaeologists, tourists and Pagans in such a way as to accommodate all. Stonehenge is, intrinsically, a monument, but Avebury is a community, and its modern history is one of successful accommodation of an ever growing complexity and diversity in the components, permanent and transitory, which comprise it.



# Appendix 1:

## Documentary Sources

Examples of Avebury-relevant online and other accessible sources. *These are only examples and do not represent a comprehensive or definitive list.*

Note: facsimiles whether printed or online may be imperfect reproductions, from unreadable and missing pages to split illustrations and marks.

### Archive collections

Alexander Keiller Museum

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/nra/lists/GB-1659-MS.Collections.htm>

Ashmolean Museum

<http://www.ashmolean.org/collections/>

Bath Record Office

<http://www.batharchives.co.uk/>

Bodleian Library

<http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/bodley/eresources>

Bowood

<http://www.bowood-house.co.uk/research.html>

British Library

<http://www.bl.uk/reshelp/findhelprestype/catblhold/all/allcat.html>

British Library (Newspaper Catalogues)

<http://www.bl.uk/reshelp/inrooms/blnewspapers/newscat/newscat.html>

British Museum

[http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/libraries\\_and\\_archives.aspx](http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/libraries_and_archives.aspx)

Churchill College Cambridge

<http://www.chu.cam.ac.uk/archives/>

Dickens Museum

<http://www.dickensmuseum.com/resources/researchers.html>

Dorset Record Office

<http://www.dorsetforyou.com/dorsethistorycentre/collections>

English Heritage

<http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/professional/archives-and-collections/nmr/archives/>

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<http://www.nhm.ac.uk/research-curation/library/archives/index.html>

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Society of Antiquaries of London  
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Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre  
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Wiltshire Museum, Devizes  
Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society (WAHNS)  
<http://www.wiltshireheritage.org.uk/library/>  
<http://www.wiltshireheritage.org.uk/collections/>

## **ARCHON Directory**

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/archon/searches/locresult.asp?LR=1659>

## **Avebury Chapel**

Restoration  
<http://www.minervaconservation.com/projects/avebury.html>

Visitor's Book entry selection  
<http://www.aveburychapel.co.uk/Visitor%20Book%20Page%201.htm>

## **Avebury Online Parish Clerk Records**

Avebury Census Returns 1861

<http://www.wiltshire-opc.org.uk/Items/Avebury%20-%20Census%201861.pdf>

Avebury Poll of Freeholders 1772

<http://www.wiltshire-opc.org.uk/Items/Avebury%20-%20Poll%20of%20Freeholders%201772.pdf>

Avebury St James Biographical Memorial Roll of Honour 1914-18 & 1939-45

<http://www.wiltshire-opc.org.uk/Items/Avebury%20-%20Roll%20of%20Honour%20-%20Avebury.pdf>

## **Avebury Rights of Way**

<http://www.wiltshirelaf.org.uk/definitive-avebury.htm>

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## **Avebury map**

Local plan 2011

[http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/kennet\\_local\\_plan\\_2011\\_-\\_avebury.pdf](http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/kennet_local_plan_2011_-_avebury.pdf)

## **Avebury Teacher's Kit**

<http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/publications/avebury-teachers-kit/>

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## **GENUKI**

Avebury

<http://www.genuki.org.uk/big/eng/WIL/Avebury/index.html>

Church Records and Indexes

<http://www.genuki.org.uk/big/eng/WIL/church.html#WSRO>

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Name search

[http://www.oodwooc.co.uk/church\\_names/ph\\_AveburyVill\\_snames.htm](http://www.oodwooc.co.uk/church_names/ph_AveburyVill_snames.htm)

## Wiltshire Family History Society

Parish transcripts and other publications:

<http://www.wiltshirefhs.co.uk/WFHSPublications.pdf>

## Wiltshire Council

Avebury Population Figures

<http://history.wiltshire.gov.uk/community/getcensus.php?id=15>

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Wills, inventories, depositions, oaths

[http://history.wiltshire.gov.uk/heritage/wills\\_search.php?community\\_in=Avebury](http://history.wiltshire.gov.uk/heritage/wills_search.php?community_in=Avebury)

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The Stonehenge, Avebury and Associated Sites World Heritage Site consists of two blocks of Wessex chalkland some 40 km apart. Individually they contain distinctive complexes of Neolithic and Bronze Age monuments; together they are one of the most iconic and important prehistoric landscapes in the world.

This volume consists of a *Resource Assessment* of the Avebury part of the World Heritage Site, summarising the known archaeological and historical record and the key techniques used in their investigation. Together with the *Research Agenda and Strategy* and the *Stonehenge Update*, these volumes provide the first integrated Research Framework for the whole of the World Heritage Site.

Resulting from discussion across the research community – through meetings, workshops and on-line consultation – the Framework offers a guide that encompasses the widest possible set of views and priorities. It is in every sense a collaborative document, produced by and for the constituency of researchers working in the World Heritage Site.



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