Chapter 3: Documentary Evidence, Work of Antiquaries and Previous Investigations

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One short bright gleam of history from the writings of monks of a thousand years ago; traditions and dim legends . . .; a dry notice here and there by some old antiquary of the 17th or 18th century; stories floating in the memories of old men still living; small broad sheets from country presses, with lists of competitors for prizes at rustic games, newspaper articles, . . . scraps of antiquarian lore . . . and odd rhymes

Thomas Hughes (1889)

INTRODUCTION

The unusual complex of monuments on White Horse Hill has been of great interest to people throughout past centuries, and an extensive and varied body of literature has been generated over the years. Thomas Hughes, well known as the author of *Tom Brown's Schooldays,*wrote a semi-fictional work commemorating the 1857 Scouring of the White Horse (Hughes 1889), and many others have also written on the Horse. Information from the available documentary evidence and literature, from the time of the Anglo-Saxon charters onwards, is summarised below. The ideas are presented to elucidate the influences which affected current thinking on the monuments on the Hill before the recent investigations took place. Table 3.1 (see CD at the back of report) also provides a summary of the main events and publications concerning the sites.

ANGLO-SAXON CHARTERS

The earliest documentary references to the monuments on White Horse Hill, though it is not referred to by this name, occur in the Anglo-Saxon charters and related boundary clauses. Charters relating to this area exist from as early as AD 856 (Hooke 1987). The land parcels recorded consisted of strips running from the top of the Downs, down the edge of the scarp and out across the Vale to give each grant a share of the landscape types and associated resources (Fig. 3.1). The grants of particular interest are those concerning Uffington and Woolstone, known as *Uffentune* and *Æscesbyrig* respectively.

The estate name *Æscesbyrig* is derived from *Æscesburh*, or the fortification of *Æsc*, which seems to have been the name given to Uffington Castle by the Anglo-Saxons. A related term *Æscesdun* probably applied to the whole of the Berkshire Downs. This has relevance to the antiquarians' debate centuries later when much was made of the identification of the location of the Battle of *Æscesdun* of AD 871 with

the area around White Horse Hill. In AD 856 King Athelwulf granted 20 hides at *Æscesbyrig* to Aldred, King Eadmund then granted this land in AD 944 to his minister Wulfric. A further 20 hides were added to this when King Eadred made another grant to Wulfric about AD 958. The whole estate subsequently became known as *Olvricestone*, or Wulfric's estate, as it was first recorded in the Doomsday Survey of AD 1086.

The *Uffentune* estate had first been granted in AD 931 by Æthelstan, then ealdorman of East Anglia, to the church of St Mary at Abingdon. King Eadred later granted it to his minister, Ælfsige, and his wife, in AD 953. The boundary between these two estates originally ran through the middle of the hillfort, and continued to do so up until the late post-medieval period, when the 1777 Enclosure Act allotted the whole area of the fort and the Horse to the Manor of Uffington. The boundary clauses relating to these
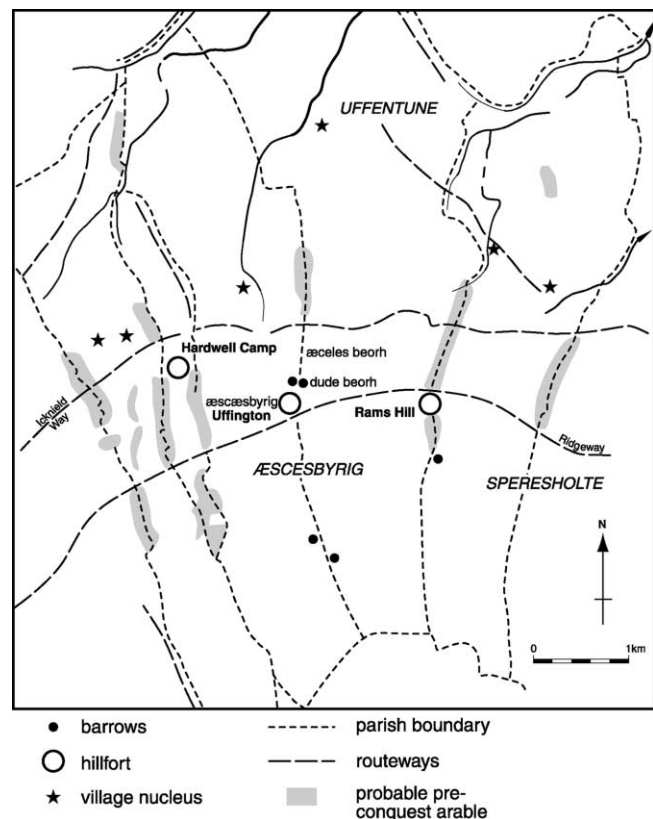

Figure 3.1 Selected Anglo-Saxon boundaries around the area of the White Horse (after Hooke 1987, fig. 3).

two Anglo-Saxon estates is particularly interesting as they contain the first references to the monuments on White Horse Hill. The clause concerning Uffington states that it runs *'into Æscesburh suðgeate and swa utæt pam norðgeate'* or 'to Ashbury's south gate and thus out of the north gate'. Since the only original gateway into the hillfort lies on its western side, the south and north gates referred to in this clause seem to be the two breaches in the ramparts. From there the boundary ran down to Dragon Hill, and, 'over crosswise and straight down unto Icknield Street' (Gelling 1967–8).

Barrow-shaped Dragon Hill was called *æceles beorh* or *eceles beorh*, and the word *eceles* has two possible interpretations. It could be derived from the British word *eclesia* meaning a Christian church, as some are known to have been located outside hillforts (Hooke 1987, 134), to make Christian a former pagan site. Alternatively, *eceles* could also be a personal name, particularly given the combination with the word for barrow. The Old English word *hlaw* may have been used for barrows constructed or reused for Anglo-Saxon burials, with the term *beorg* or *beorh* being used for earlier barrows or barrow-shaped hills, as at Dragon Hill (ibid., 132).

Dude beorh mentioned in the charters, could refer to the larger and more obvious of the two barrows known on the hill, although the smaller round barrow was actually used for Anglo-Saxon burials (see Fig. 2.1). The clause in the charter relating to the western boundary of the *Uffentune* estate stated that the boundary ran out of the hillfort 'from the middle of the north gate onto Dudda's fort; from Dudda's fort onto eceles barrow'. Dudda's fort could be a confused reference to one of the barrows and this would fit well with the charter references to the landscape features on the Hill.

The evidence of these documents therefore strongly suggests that the hillfort ramparts had been breached before the end of the 10th century AD, and that these entrances are probably not recent features. Dragon Hill was thought, at this time, to be a prehistoric barrow, an idea which was picked up in legend and the antiquarian thought of centuries later. It may also suggest that Dragon Hill was not used for burial during Anglo-Saxon times.

There is a strange silence on the existence of the White Horse, as there is no mention made of it in the Anglo-Saxon charters or boundary clauses. If the Horse existed at this time the boundary must have passed very near to it, between the north-eastern entrance of the hillfort and Dragon Hill. This could argue against its existence at this time and almost certainly against the Horse being a monument created during the time of the great Anglo-Saxon King Alfred in AD 871, this has led to the suggestion that it was of later construction, although similar evidence could be raised about other ancient chalk figures. For example, the earliest reference to the Cerne Abbas Giant dates to 1764, but the figure is certainly older (Marples 1949, 19).

OTHER MEDIEVAL DOCUMENTS

Place name evidence

Documents survive from the 11th and 12th centuries in which the White Horse and White Horse Hill are well known, and used as accepted place names, suggesting that the monument was an established and recognised feature of the landscape. If constructed only after the 10th century, it is questionable that the Horse would have become so well known by the later 11th century, as it took some time for place names to become established, particularly in medieval society when information was disseminated slowly.

References to the White Horse and White Horse Hill are found in the Abingdon cartularies thought to date from the later parts of the 11th and 12th centuries (Thoms 1846, 290–1), which describe land boundaries in the area, and references to the Horse continued to be made throughout the medieval period. The Public Records Office holds a document of 1273 that gives the vernacular name of le Whitehors (IPM C 133/2/6), and Plenderleath (1885) lists a number of references to the White Horse and the Vale of White Horse, dating from the 14th century.

The Wonders of Britain

A reference to the monument as a miraculous place in a document of the late 11th or 12th centuries may suggest that the Horse was already an ancient landscape feature by that time. In a list of the *Wonders of Britain*, the White Horse was placed alongside Stonehenge and the Rollright Stones. Memories and tales of its construction and maintenance do not seem to have been current as this would have undermined the idea that it was a 'wonder', particularly as the most wondrous thing about it seems to have been that no grass grew on its surface.

Quintum; Albus equus cum pullo suo. Myrum est quod in figura equi sic factus fuit quod cum totus locus, ubi est illa equi Ymago nimis herbosus sit, super equi formam numquam herba crescat, sed semper ibi terra ad modum equi sit denudata.

De Mirabilibus Britanniae, Abbreviantiones Chronicorum by Radulfi de Diceto Lundoniensis

Fifth, is the White Horse with its foal. It is wonderful that it was so made in the figure of a horse that over the whole place where that image of a horse is, no grass may grow. Grass never grows over the shape of the horse but always there the earth is bare to the full extent of the horse.

This is the first report of the White Horse as a location, within surviving documentary sources, rather than its mention merely as a place name. The date of this manuscript is unclear, although it may predate the earliest of the Abingdon cartulary reference. Radulfi de Diceto, Dean of London,
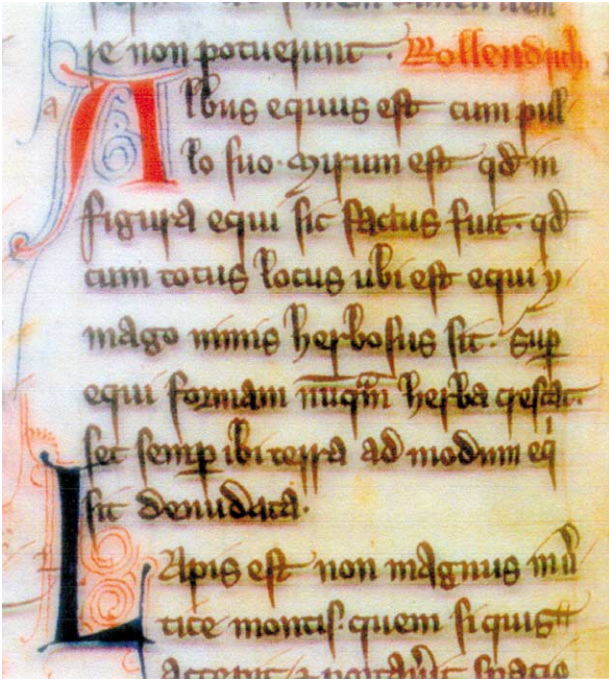
Plate 3.1 12th-century manuscript The Wonders of Britain *listing the White Horse as a wonder where 'grass never grows', from* De Mirabilibus Britanniae, Abbreviantiones Chronicorum *(Copyright: The Master and Fellows of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge).*

included a copy of this list among his *Historical Works* begun in 1180 (Diceto 1180; edited from the original manuscripts by William Stubbs 1876). There is likely to have been more than one copy of the *Wonders of Britain*, and Ravenhill (1926) refers to a document among the Bede manuscripts held in Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, and written in 'Charter Hand', which dates from the early part of the 14th century. This manuscript (Plate 3.1) also deals with the *Wonders of Britain*, and it includes the White Horse only second after Stonehenge, and this could be another version of the document known to de Diceto. The original of this list is likely to have been older than the de Diceto or the Bede manuscripts. Woolner (1965, 31–2) suggests that the manuscript used by de Diceto may have dated to around 1100 on the basis of the place names contained within it.

The reference to an accompanying foal may indicate that the text was concerned with another White Horse, but given the bias toward this area displayed in the list of other 'Wonders', it is possible that this is a mistaken translation from a lost original. There is no mention of a foal in any other early or later references to this site.

PICTORIAL REPRESENTATIONS

Medieval references to this monument were not restricted to manuscripts; pictorial representations were also made of the Horse during this period.

A tenor bell of 14th-century date, made in the foundry at Wokingham, hung in the western tower of the Abbey Church of St Peter and St Paul, Dorchester-on-Thames may show the earliest pictorial representation of the monument yet recognised (Woolner 1965, 32, fig. 16). Beside the inscriptions to St Birinus and foundry marks, this bell has a representation of a horse in a curious out-stretched pose with its tail continuing the line of its back and a representation of a dragon (Fig. 3.2). The two symbols together may represent the White Horse and Dragon Hill, despite the fact the horse bears little resemblance to the White Horse as it is known today.

A more certain representation of the monument is known on the 16th-century Sheldon tapestry which now belongs to the Bodleian but is held in the Victoria and Albert Museum (Plate 3.2). This shows a white horse in the convention of the period on a green hill. Though this also bears little resemblance to the White Horse it is clear from the location indicated that the intention was to represent the monument.

THE ANTIQUARIANS' VIEW

A wide range of people, from eccentrics and collectors as well as genuine scholars of the ancient past, became recognised from the late 16th century as 'antiquarians', though they would not necessarily have thought of themselves as such. They collected evidence on the surviving material culture of Roman and pre-Roman antiquity, and on documentary history and genealogy. The ideas of the antiquarians from the 17th to the 19th centuries, influenced thinking about ancient monuments. Rather than simply existing as natural phenomena these landscape features were recognised as being the creations of past peoples. How these monuments had been created, and when and by whom, increasingly became the focus of the debate among these scholars.
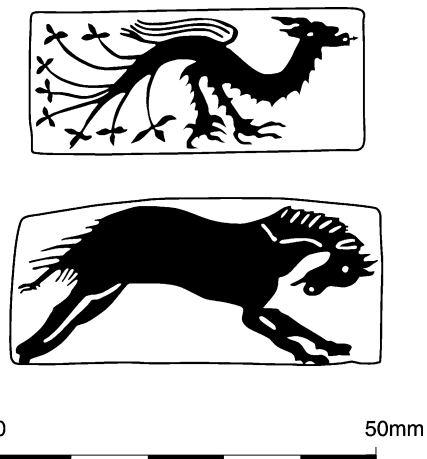

Figure 3.2 Inscription on the 14th-century St Birinus bell of the Abbey Church of St Peter and St Paul, Dorchester-on-Thames, Oxon, showing representations of a Horse and Dragon (after Woolner 1965, fig. 16).
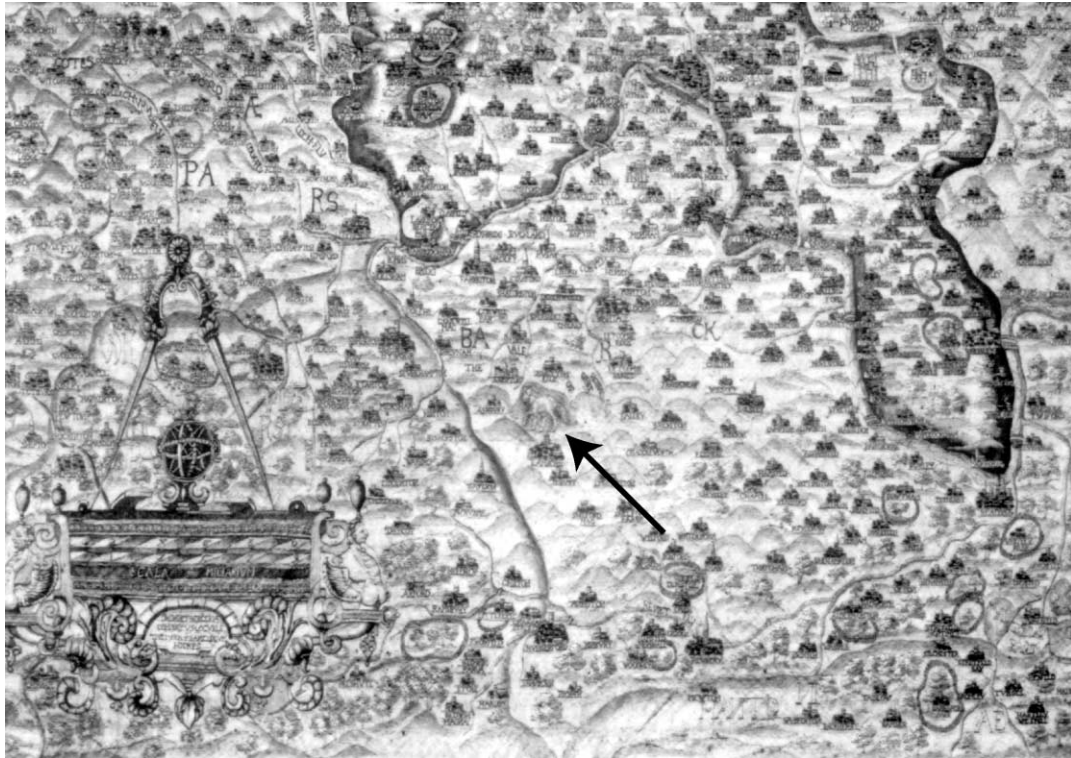
Plate 3.2 Sheldon Tapestry showing image of the White Horse, 16th or 17th century (Copyright: V&A Picture Library).

John Leland was one of the first English scholars to be recognised as an antiquarian. He had been educated at both the major English universities in the 16th century on the commission of King Henry VIII. He produced topographical works on antiquaries of the country, describing these curiosities but making no attempt to interpret or explain them. His *Itinerary* (1535–43) included references to the Vale of White Horse, but the monuments were not discussed.

William Camden was the first antiquarian to mention any of the monuments specifically in *Britannia* (1607). The author was under public commission to travel throughout the country and report on all curiosities, but he does not appear to have taken a detour to look at the White Horse in detail. He mentions the 'shape of a white horse imagined to appear in the whitish chalky hill, they terme The Vale of Whitehorse' (1607; 1637). However, a map drawn by Christopher Saxton, included in the 1637 edition, shows the Vale of the Whitehorse and Whitehorse Hill in the correct places indicating that the writer was well aware of the location. Later translations by Gibson in 1695 and Gough in 1789, word this differently. Gibson's version uses 'fancy'd', which suggests an imaginary figure, but Gough's translation of the phrase, 'supposed to be cut', may make the sense intended by the author a little clearer.

John Aubrey presented the first treatise on these monuments to include speculation on their origins. Ideas he put forward in *Monumenta Britannica* (1665–93) formed the basis for interpretation in

the coming centuries. The White Horse, Dragon Hill and Uffington Castle were all discussed and dates suggested for them.

THE WHITE HORSE

17th- and 18th-century interpretations

The White Horse created a great deal of interest among the antiquarians. Aubrey gave alternative interpretations of the origins of this monument. Firstly, he maintained that the 'rich and pleasant Vale of White Horse' was taken into the possession of the Saxon King Hengist or Horsa (Aubrey 1665–93, 821–2), and both names signified a horse. Also, as a white horse was their standard at the Conquest of Britain, this must have been its origin. Nevertheless, subsequently, when describing a coin found in a breach in the wall at Colchester he stated that the reverse featured a horse. This was quite usual for the coins of the ancient Britons and had put 'him in mind of the White Horse cut in the hill called White-Horse Hill in Berks: which some will have to be made by Hengist or Horsa' (ibid., 996–7).

It was the idea that Saxon conquerors were responsible for the Horse which caught the imagination and became the most widely accepted idea on the origin of the monument in the 17th and 18th centuries. The enlarged version of Camden's *Britannia* (1695) included Aubrey's interpretation that the White Horse was made by Hengist. However,

the author left it to others to determine whether this was true, since 'the conjecture is not warranted by any direct testimony from history' (ibid., 150). Aubrey's ideas were also restated the *Magna Britannia et Hibernia Antiqua and Nova* (Cox 1720).

Daniel Defoe's *A Tour through Great Britain* (1725, 51; 1738, 42) confirmed this view. In addition, he described the Horse as seen from the Vale as 'a trench cut on the side of a high green hill, this trench is cut into the shape of a horse, and not ill-shaped I assure you. The trench is two yards wide at the top, about a yard deep, and filled almost up with chalk, so that at a distance, for it is seen many miles off, you see the exact shape of a white horse.' Previous accounts had assumed that the Horse had been formed merely by exposure of the chalk bedrock, but interestingly these new observations by Defoe were proved to be accurate by the late 20th-century excavations.

In 1730 Francis Wise of Trinity College, Oxford, wrote a *Letter to Dr Mead* on 'Some Antiquities in Berkshire', which took up this theme of the origins of the Horse and pursued the argument further. He stated that Hengist made the Horse because it appeared on his standard, but also that the carving was made to commemorate the battle when the Saxon King Alfred defeated the Danes in AD 871. Wise also described the Horse, as it was when he visited the site, its state of repair and the local belief that it had moved position up the hill over time. He commented on the Scouring of the White Horse festival, and on the local people who had maintained

the Horse. The attribution of the Horse to Alfred was becoming widely accepted by scholars and local people alike (Wise 1738).

Accompanying Wise's *Letter* was a reproduction of a copper engraving by W Greene belonging to the landowner, Lord Craven. The representation of the White Horse bore very little resemblance to the Wise description of the monument. In the letter, he described the Horse's head, neck, body and tail consisting of 'one white line, as does also each of his four legs', whereas the illustration shows a realistic representation of a galloping horse (Plate 3.3 and Fig. 3.4a). Greene's engraving became the accepted view of the White Horse. It was reproduced and copied with minor changes numerous times although the artist was not always acknowledged.

In 1738 Thomas Hammond produced a series of four views of White Horse Hill made from Lord Barrington's Park in the Vale. These sketches were intended to illustrate Wise's *Letter*, and to show the Horse as it actually was at that time rather than how the owner or artist thought it should look. One of these sketches (Plate 3.4 and Fig. 3.4b) manages to convey how the monument would have appeared to someone approaching it from below. These sketches, however, were not published so did not become widely known.

The publication of Wise's *Letter* was answered by a humorous and scathing assault from 'Philalethes Rusticus', which is likely to have been a pseudonym of Wise's rival Thomas Asplin. Rusticus pointed out
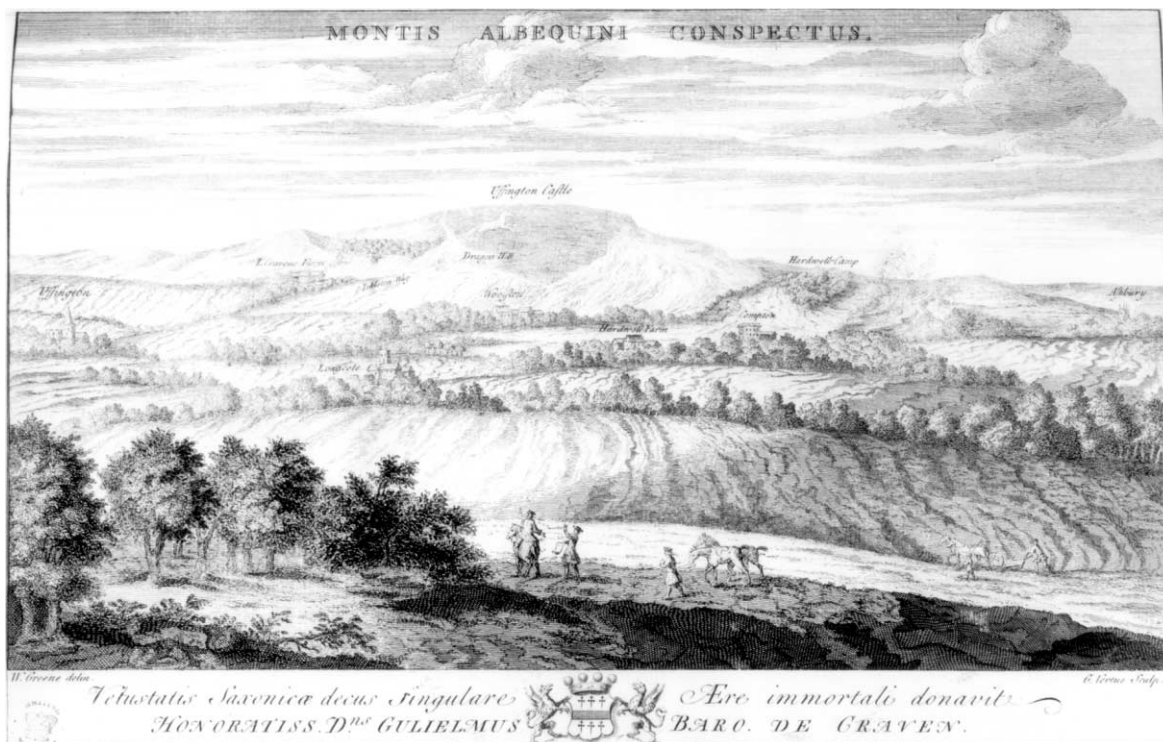

Plate 3.3   Reproduction of a copper engraving by W Greene of about 1730, with a view of White Horse Hill showing the White Horse, Uffington Castle hillfort and Dragon Hill (Copyright: British Library).
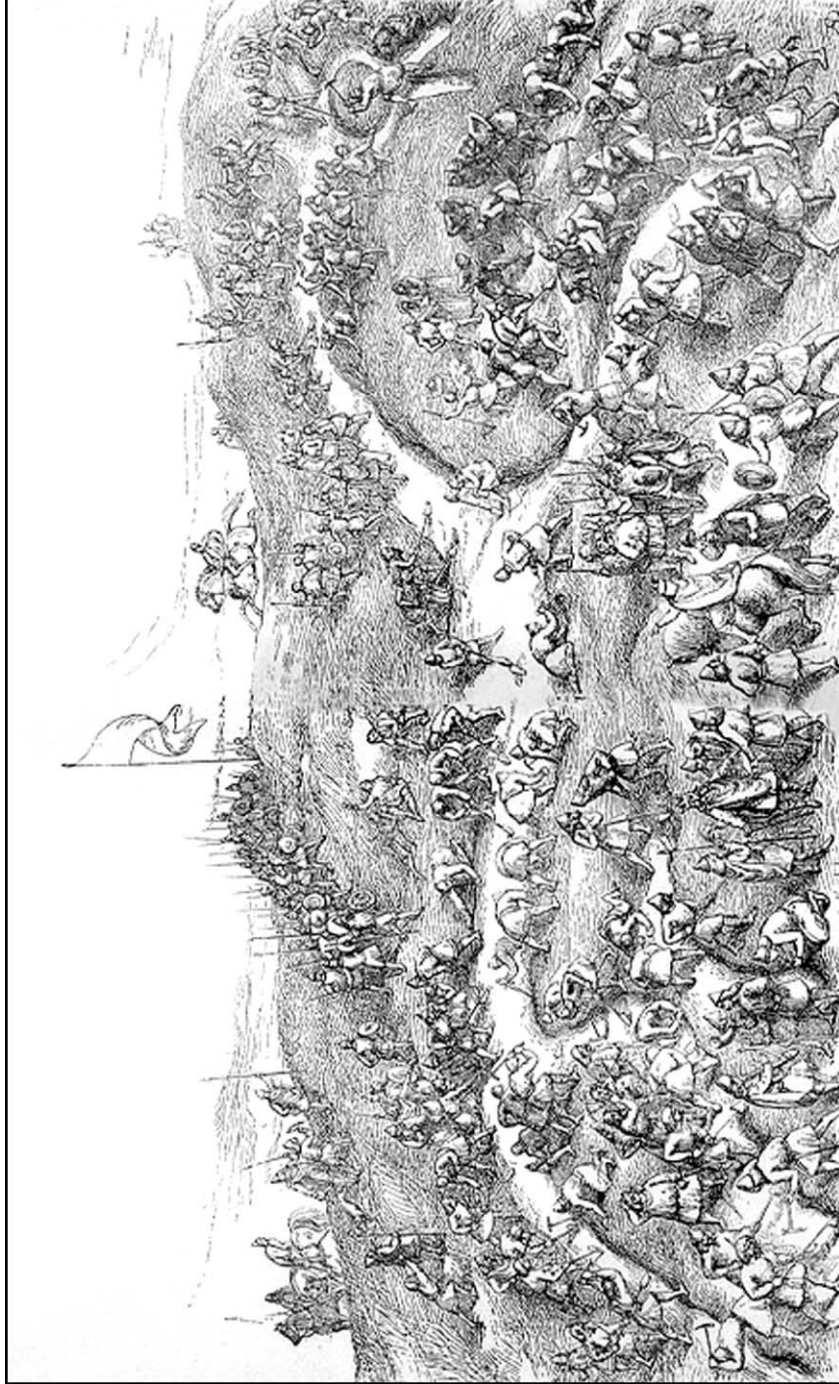
Figure 3.3   King Alfred's army cutting the White Horse following the Battle of Ashdown in AD 871 (Richard Doyle's illustration in Hughes 1889, frontispiece).

that the Saxon King Alfred's coat of arms was not a horse but a cross. He put forward another hypothesis for the origin of the figure, from Aubrey's paper, suggesting that the figure and posture of the Horse are exactly as seen on British coins seen in Speed (Rusticus 1740, 22, referring to Speed 1611). This was almost certainly written because Wise was a numismatist and particularly interested in British coinage.

Many scholars picked up on this numismatic evidence in 18th century and came to regard it as conclusive. The Reverend William Stukeley included an account of the White Horse based on his daughter's observations in his *Family Memoirs* for 1758. In this the Horse is said to be 'very much in the scheme of the British horses on the reverse of their coins' and supports this with a report of British coins being found nearby.

In the new edition of Camden's *Britannia* published in 1789, however, Gough describes the White Horse and the scouring festival briefly before going on to the origins of this and other neighbouring monuments. Aubrey's attribution of the White Horse to Hengist is mentioned but the monument is said with 'great probability' to be a memorial of Alfred's victory over the Danes at Aescesdun, Ashdown, in AD 871. In 1796 a letter from J. Stone in the *Gentleman's Magazine* reiterated this view and added a new sketch (Fig. 3.4c), which gave a more truthful representation of the Horse.

19th- and 20th-century interpretations

A decade later Lysons' representation of 1803 was also much more realistic (Plate 3.5 and Fig. 3.4d).
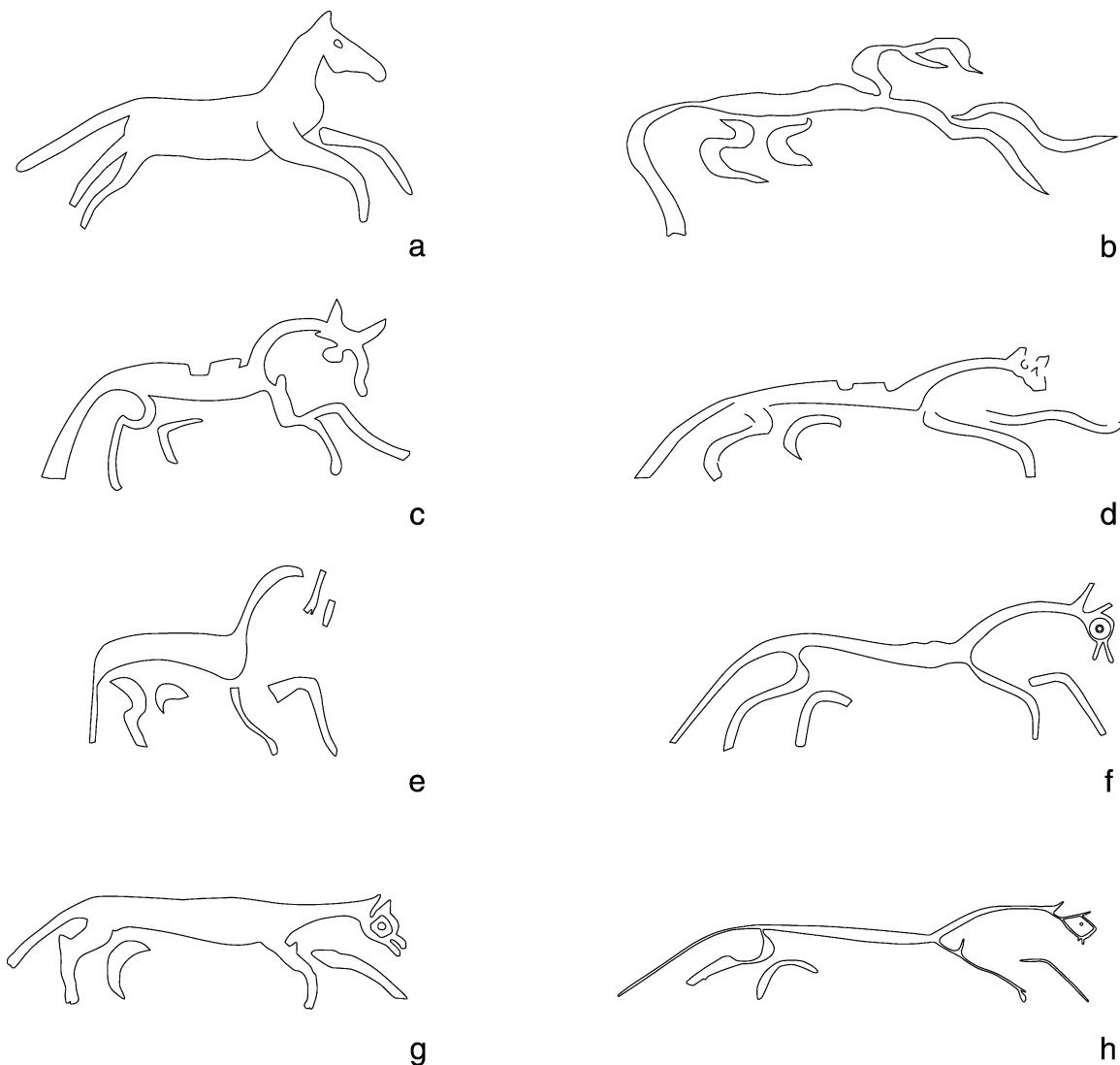

Figure 3.4   Pictorial representations of the White Horse: after a) a copper engraving by Greene published in Wise 1738, b) an unpublished sketch by Thomas Hammond dating to 1738, c) Stone 1796, d) Lysons 1803, e) an unpublished sketch on the back of a note to Fredrick Madden in 1823, f) a measured drawing by Edmonds 1835, published in Thoms 1846, g) early 20th-century postcard, h) aerial photograph on 1990s postcard (after 'Atmosphere' postcards 493). (Figures 3.4a, 3.4d and 3.4e Copyright: British Library.)
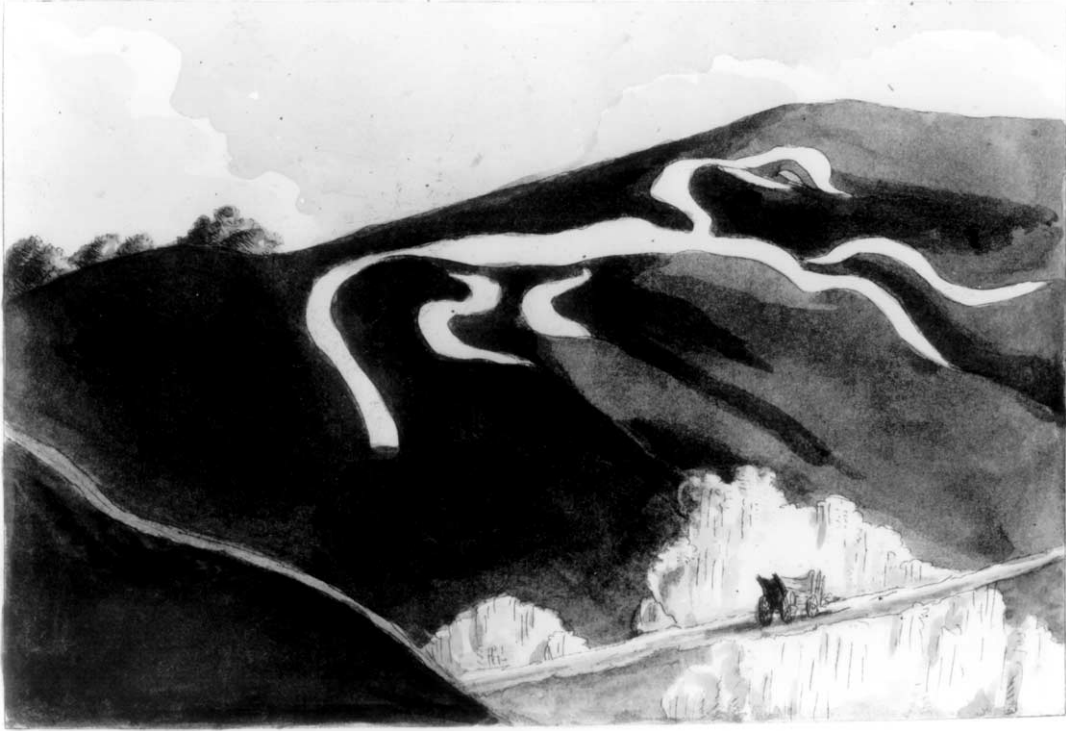
Plate 3.4   Sketch of White Horse Hill drawn by Sir Thomas Hammond from Lord Barrington's Park in the Vale in 1738 (Copyright: The Society of Antiquaries of London).
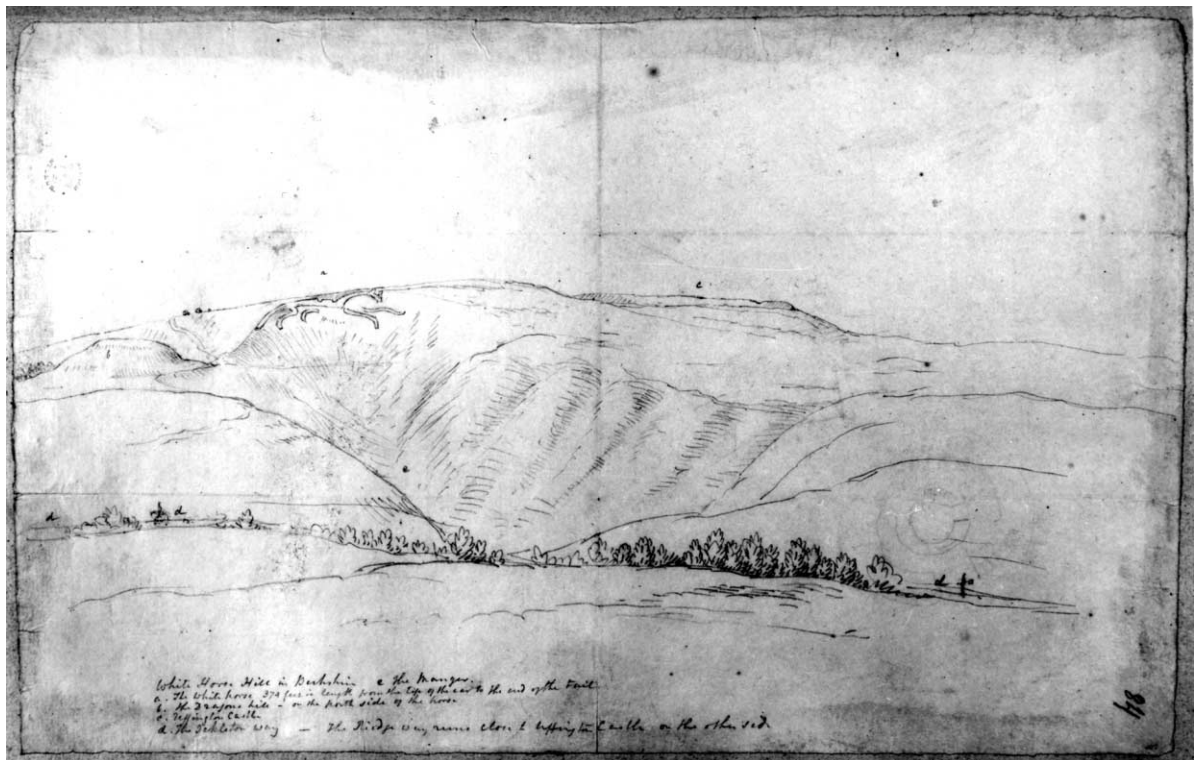

Plate 3.5   Realistic representation of the White Horse on the Hill by Lysons in 1803 (Copyright: British Library).

These more truthful images of the Horse continued with a sketch on the back of a note to Fredrick Madden dated 1823 (Fig. 3.4e), and the measured drawing by Christopher Edmonds of Bishopstone in 1835 (published in Thoms 1846: Fig. 3.4f).

In his *Ancient History of North Wiltshire* of 1819, Colt Hoare also attributed the construction of the White Horse to King Alfred. However, an ancient British date for the White Horse given by stylistic comparisons of the figure to those featured on Celtic coins, was also considered. Another writer, Akerman, in a letter annexed to 'Some Observations on the White Horse of Berkshire' (Thoms 1846), referred to Gaulish and British coins with galloping horses, although in a later publication he stated that the Horse could have a Saxon origin. In his paper Thoms also made comparisons with British coins, but suggested too that the White Horse could have been a memorial to horses which were pastured in sacred ash groves nearby.

In the following decade the landlord of the adjoining estate, Edwin Martin-Atkins, brought numerous antiquarians to look at the Horse. It was decided 'to celebrate the Scouring of the White Horse according to immemorial custom' on the 17 to the 18 of September 1857, and the Committee of Management, including Martin-Atkins, felt that it would be of general interest if 'some little printed material' was produced to commemorate the event. This was to include not only the doings on the Hill, but should also endeavour to gather up the scattered legends and traditions of the countryside, and 'any authentic historical notices relating to the monument' (Hughes 1889, preface). Another member of this committee, Thomas Hughes, was commissioned to do the work as his 'way of life had led him into the perilous paths of literature' (ibid.). He decided that a novel would be the best way to bring all these diverse threads together.

The novel was produced under the title of *The Scouring of the White Horse* published in 1859 (reprinted in 1889). In this work Hughes reviewed most of the earlier ideas about the origins of the monument discussed above, including the folklore. Hughes favoured the interpretation that the Horse was created by King Alfred after the Battle of Ashdown. He was advised by not only Martin-Atkins, but also Akerman, on the antiquarian's view of the monuments of the hilltop and must have been aware of the possible Celtic origin of the figure.

Hughes' work, being mainly a retrospective review for popular consumption did not advance the debate on the origins of the monument greatly and the subject largely languished, as indeed the figure was to, in the late decades of the century. The 1857 scouring was the final such festival, despite a report (Wilson 1871a) that Lord Craven was intending to revive the festival 'the next or following September'. By 1880 the Reverend W C Plenderleath (1880) observed that the figure was 'so overgrown with weeds as scarcely to be discernible from a distance, except by a person who knows precisely where to look for it'.

Plenderleath was one of the few antiquaries to discuss the figure during the late 19th century, publishing an article in 1874 in the *Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine* and a book in 1892 concerned with white horses and other turf figures in the south-west of England, particularly Wiltshire. The article was illustrated with an enlarged copy of the Christopher Edmonds' 1935 sketch (Fig. 3.4f), and he went on to compare the Horse to Iron Age coins, in particular one of Bodno of the Iceni from Speed (1611, 176), which has an image of a 'beaked' horse. However, an image from a coin of a nearer tribe, the Dobunni, is very like the Horse. On a gold stater (Fig. 3.5) of a pre-Conquest ruler of this group, named Eisu, a galloping horse with a beak very like the White Horse is apparent (Allen 1944, plate IV.11).

This approach to the dating of the figure continued into the 20th century. Various authors including Huntingford (1920), Crawford (1929) and, particularly, Piggott (1931a) maintained that the Horse was of Iron Age date based on stylistic comparisons to Celtic coins. Piggott believed that examination of the style of the figure was the only way in which it could be dated, since it bore no stratigraphic relationship to any object of known date. Marples (1949) also took this approach, but drew parallels from further afield to come up with an earlier date. Marples believed that the figure dated from the late Bronze Age/early Iron Age, much earlier than most previous writers had allowed. Petrie (1926) had suggested a Bronze Age date based on evidence from other hill figures he believed to be ancient and probably related to the Uffington White Horse. This dating was fairly tenuous and dismissed after due consideration by Piggott (1931a), and was not seriously considered by later writers.

In the past centuries, as described above, a number of quite different images had therefore been presented for the Horse, shown in summary in Figure 3.4. These reflect the varying thoughts on the Horse and its origins throughout this time. The final two images show the representation of the Horse drawn from an early 20th-century postcard (Fig. 3.4g) and from a recent postcard giving an aerial view (Fig. 3.4h).

Figure 3.5 Representation of a beaked prancing horse from a pre-Conquest Iron Age stater of Eisu, a ruler of the Dobunni tribe (after Allen 1944, plate IV.11).

Some more recent researchers, particularly Woolner (1965), decided that a stylistic approach was invalid, since it was unlikely that the shape of the figure had been exactly preserved due to repeated scourings. An alternative view of the date of the Horse was presented, and based solely on documentary evidence, the monument was said to have originated in the Saxon period when it was first recorded. A more realistic original shape backed up this date for the figure Woolner thought was represented by ridges in the turf surrounding the Horse.

A dichotomy has therefore ensued, regarding the date and origins of the Horse. Opinions have been divided between those who supported Iron Age dates derived from stylistic comparisons with coins and those who favoured a date based on the documentary and folklore evidence, as it had since Aubrey's first ideas in the late 17th century.

DRAGON HILL

Lying below the White Horse, and sometimes associated with it, is the enigmatic prominence known as Dragon Hill. The unusual appearance of the hill and the legends that had grown up around it attracted antiquarian attention, and although most dismissed the local myths, some felt the hill was not entirely natural and tried to explain its origins.

Aubrey (1665–93) was the first to suggest that it was 'perhaps the tumulus of Uter-pen-dragon', a British chief who Aubrey thought had fought against the Saxons and may have been slain here, and from whom Dragon Hill took its name. Gibson restated this idea in his version of Camden's *Britannia* in 1695, and similarly, Cox (1720) reiterated Aubrey's ideas. Stukeley (1758) referred to a tumulus near to the White Horse called Pendragon, which he believed to be 'one of the places of horse and chariot races at the midsummer sacrifice in the times of the British kings'.

This contrasted with the view of the people at this time as stated in a letter of Bishop Pococke. According to him 'On Dragon Hill the common people say St George killed the dragon. They show a spot on it which they affirm is never covered with grass, and there they say the dragon was killed, and I think buried, and that the White Horse was St George's steed' (1757). Gough (Camden 1789) supported the view that it was a mausoleum of earth like Silbury Hill, although Colt Hoare (1819) was not certain that Dragon Hill was entirely artificial. He thought that it was 'thrown up like Silbury, but it appears to me that part of the upper ridge has been cut away in order to form it'.

In *The Scouring of the White Horse* Hughes (1889, chapter 2) repeated the folklore regarding the hill as the burial place of the dragon killed by King George, but went on to describe it as a 'burial-place, larger and grander' than the other barrows on the hilltop. In this semi-fictional story it was also stated that the hill was believed to mark the grave of some British

chief called Arthur or Uter Pendragon who had been slain by the Saxons in the vicinity. In the form of a footnote the view of Edwin Martin-Atkins was added, as he believed that Uter Pendragon had been buried there, but that his remains had been disturbed by the 'decapitation of the barrow'. A limited archaeological investigation into the top of the hill had been instigated by the landowner, Lord Craven, in 1852. Martin-Atkins may have been involved and this could have led to the decapitation theory. The excavation had shown the bedrock forming this hill to be overlain by only natural topsoil with no archaeological deposits. Martin-Atkins was still interested in carrying out a full-scale excavation of the hilltop, but no record of this having been done exists.

Occasional finds of Roman artefacts from the hill, led to the idea that it was in use in the Roman period. Finds of bones on the sides of the hill where chalk had been quarried occasionally revived interest, but generally investigation in the hill waned. Observations by Piggott as a schoolboy in 1925 led him to believe that the hill was artificial, but this was never followed up. Speculation was generated by analysis of the Anglo-Saxon charters by people like Grinsell (1986) and Hooke (1987), and both noted the puzzling Anglo-Saxon place named *eceles beorh*.

UFFINGTON HILLFORT

Antiquarians paid less attention to the various hillforts in the area. Aubrey included all three of the hillforts, which survived as prominent earthworks in the immediate vicinity – Uffington Castle, Hardwell Camp and Alfred's Castle – in his *Monumenta Britannica* (1665–93). However, often the hillforts were generally referred to only when they could be fitted into a wider theory as in Gough's version of Camden's *Britannia* where the author sought to relate most of the monuments on the hill to the battle of Ashdown.

Aubrey described a camp beside Ashbury Park, clearly Alfred's Castle, and suggested it was Danish, as the single earthworks are 'as near round as square' (1665–93). He then goes on to describe another camp above the White Horse 'with single works but very great'. This camp, Uffington Castle, was shown in a small figure in the margin to have square corners and was compared to Lidcomb, or Letcomb Castle, which Aubrey considered to be of Roman date. Aubrey also proposed an alternative date for this hillfort as the camp of Uter-pen-dragon (ibid., 821–2), suggesting that Uffington Castle might not have been built by the Romans, but by the British to oppose the invading Saxons.

Wise (1738, 22) supported the first of Aubrey's dates when he referred to 'a large Roman entrenchment called Uffington Castle'. Spencer writing in 1771 also followed Aubrey and Wise viewing Uffington Castle as a Roman entrenchment. In Gough's 1789 version of Camden's *Britannia* Uffington Castle was described as a Roman

entrenchment but used by the Danes during the battle. Hardwell Camp on the shoulder of the slope was attributed to the Saxons and Alfred's Castle to the Danes.

Samuel Lysons included detailed surveys of both Uffington Castle and Hardwell Camp in his *Topographical Collections – Berkshire* (*c* 1803). This collection included annotated plans and drawings and was the first publication to consider the earthworks in detail and prompted new thinking on the dating of these monuments. In Lysons *Magna Britannia – Berkshire* (1806–22) Uffington Castle is said to have been originally British, but to have been reused by the Romans, while Hardwell Camp was probably the work of the Romans on the basis of its form (ibid., 213). Roman coins found in the neighbourhood are mentioned, though the exact locations are not specified.

The idea that Uffington Castle had been held by the Danes and Hardwell Camp by the Saxon Æthelred at the start of the Battle of Ashdown was given by Hughes (1889) and this probably reflected popular opinion. Excavations on parts of the hillfort by Martin-Atkins (described in detail below) produced information on the construction of the ramparts but little dating evidence (Wilson 1871a). Although later investigations of other similar sites allowed archaeologists to date many hillforts to the Iron Age there was no confirmation of this from Uffington Castle, particularly as prehistoric, Roman and Saxon finds had been recovered from the general area in the past.

19th-century archaeological investigations

In the mid 19th century, when prehistoric archaeology became established, the debate on this monument complex had been reinvigorated, due to the work of the local landlord with a keen interest in the past, Edwin Martin-Atkins. The newly founded Archaeological Institute in Oxford took their main excursion for the year 1849–50 to the area, visiting among other sites of historical and archaeological interest Hardwell Camp and Uffington Castle. The Rev. J Wilson, President of Trinity College, University of Oxford, had commissioned Mr MacLauchlan to make detailed surveys of both of these sites. These were published in *Archaeological Journal* (VII, 1850), together with the proceedings of the group's annual meeting. Such antiquarian interest in the vicinity of his own estate prompted Martin-Atkins to take a greater interest in these sites and he became involved in the excavation of a number of them.

Edwin Martin-Atkins was born in 1808, and as the eldest son inherited the estate of Kingston Lisle in Berkshire when his father died in 1825. Edwin Martin-Atkins had been educated at Rugby School and gained a BA degree from Magdalene College Oxford in 1829. In 1835 he married Caroline Duffield, and they had five sons and three daughters including Alice who was to put together a history of the family in 1904. Martin-Atkins was probably the model for the 'squire' in *The Scouring of the White*

Horse, he was described as having been not far short of six feet tall and clean made (Hughes 1889). He was active in many aspects of the life of the local community. As well as being a magistrate, he was Sheriff of Berkshire in 1844–5 and was later the Chairman and Treasurer of the Committee for the Scouring of the White Horse festival of 1857.

It is unclear when Martin-Atkins first became interested in antiquities, but he was accepted as a Member of the newly founded Archaeological Institute in 1850, having been proposed by Dr John Wilson, who was the president of Trinity at that time. He was later to become a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries (FSA) in December 1857.

Over the three years 1850–52, Martin-Atkins was involved in excavation of Seven Barrows at Lambourn, under the auspices of the Archaeological Institute. Mr Albert Way and Dr Wilson had instigated the project, but the fieldwork was carried out by Martin-Atkins with some help from Wilson. Martin-Atkins was in regular correspondence with Wilson to report progress on this project. This correspondence together with the detailed records, sketches and plans made by Martin-Atkins are now held in the Bodleian Library in Oxford with the papers of Way and Wilson. A century later Humphrey Case was able to write a report on these excavations from these papers (Case 1956–7) and as an appendix to this report Case includes a note on the excavation methods (ibid., 27–8).

Martin-Atkins was a keen amateur, but it is clear from the methods he employed at Seven Barrows, that he was aware of some of the latest methods, probably through his connection with Dr Wilson and other academics. At a time when many excavators were still following clumsy methods of barrow opening, in some cases at least Martin-Atkins made radial cuttings into the barrows, recorded the disposition of finds, and some attempt at recording and describing stratification was made.

Martin-Atkins went on from this to be involved in a number of other excavations up until shortly before his death in 1859 at the age of 55. In 1851–2 he became involved in the excavation of Worle Camp in Somerset. His daughter reports that he 'took great interest in the ancient camp at Weston-super-Mare, and when visiting the place assisted in clearing out some of the numerous ancient pits there' (Martin-Atkins 1904, 33). This excavation was undertaken by a party of local gentlemen under the direction of the Rev. F Warre who published a report of the findings of the first season of work in the local archaeological journal, together with a copy of a plan drawn by Martin-Atkins (Warre 1851). In addition to the drawing of this plan Martin-Atkins was, with two others, responsible for superintending this excavation, and engaged in some further excavation at this site during the next year.

These two excavations must have laid the foundations for his excavation work of 1857–8 on the barrows and hillfort on White Horse Hill. The first of these involved the opening of a long mound on

the hillside above Dragon Hill during which many skeletons, some with grave goods suggesting a Roman date, were found. Excavations on this barrow were recommenced in the following year, with further skeletons and cremation urns being located. A second smaller barrow not far away on this hilltop was also opened in that season of work. Several 'carelessly buried skeletons' were found to have been interred in this second mound. In this second season of work on the hilltop Martin-Atkins was also involved in excavating parts of the hillfort ramparts, and it was during these excavations that it was discovered that the ramparts had originally been built round a timber structure. There was evidence for two parallel rows of postholes which may have housed uncut timbers.

Martin-Atkins may have been involved or at least present at the 'opening' of the supposed barrow known as Dragon Hill in 1852, but the findings of this trial excavation did not satisfy his curiosity about this enigmatic landscape feature. He mentions a planned excavation of Dragon Hill in a letter to Dr Wilson of August 1857, but this does not seem to have taken place. It is not mentioned again in his later correspondence. Nonetheless, Martin-Atkins remained interested in excavations in the area up until his death. Wilson (1871a, 177) reported that shortly before Martin-Atkins died, he referred to having found further inhumations between Uffington Castle and Seven Barrows, but this site has not been located.

Unfortunately, due to Martin-Atkins' early death, the results of the excavations on White Horse Hill were not published in full. The excavations of the barrows were reported in a paper published after Martin-Atkins' death (Davis and Thurnam 1865). This report was chiefly concerned with the skulls recovered from the long mound by John Thurnam, who had been present at the excavation. Another of Martin-Atkins' regular contacts in the academic world, Dr Wilson, also published some notes on these excavations in two notes in a local journal after the excavator's death (Wilson 1871a and b). The notes were mainly based on correspondence Wilson had received from Martin-Atkins. These letters are preserved with Wilson's papers in the Bodleian and form the fullest record remaining of these excavations. A few manuscript notes on the excavation of the round barrow were purchased by the Devizes Museum early in the 20th century according to a note in the *Wiltshire Archaeological Magazine* (1926), but these added little to what had already been published.

Martin-Atkins had, no doubt, recorded all the White Horse Hill excavations as carefully as his other work. His meticulous recording is evident from the note of his excavations on part of the rampart included in the family history produced by his daughter (Martin-Atkins 1904, 32–3). This history was eventually reproduced in full in Avery (1993, 353). Most of the records of these excavations remained with the Kingston Lisle library after the excavator's death and were likely to have been transferred to the family's house in Bath at the time of the sale of Kingston Lisle in 1906. Unfortunately, the library, presumably including the White Horse Hill archive, was destroyed during an air raid on Bath.

Martin-Atkins' widow donated the finds from all his excavations still remaining in his estate to the British Museum in 1862. A British Museum catalogue entry of the 7 July 1862 shows that this gift included a variety of pieces from his excavations at Seven Barrows, the barrows at White Horse Hill and Dragon Hill. Unfortunately, this did not include a lugged urn from White Horse Hill, described by Martin-Atkins as 'British', which was recovered from the central cist of the long mound, and this may have been lost. As a number of 'British urns' were given to the British Museum from Martin-Atkins' estate, it is possible that the White Horse pot may have been mistakenly included with the material said to be from his excavations at Lambourn Seven Barrows which was deposited with the Museum at the same time. Two lugged vessels are mentioned in this part of the inventory, but neither can be positively identified as having come from White Horse Hill. All this material is thought to be held within the Prehistoric and Romano-British Antiquaries Department of the British Museum, although it has not been possible, due to museum reorganisation in the late 20th century, to be sure that all the pieces registered in the catalogue remain.

Martin-Atkins had given the skulls recovered from the excavation of the White Horse Hill barrows to John Thurnam, and following the completion of his analysis of this material after Martin-Atkins' death Thurnam presented them to other collections. These included the College of Surgeons London, Trinity College Dublin, Dr J Barnard Davis and Professor Nicolucci of Naples. The nine presented to the College of Surgeons have been located in the Department of Human Origins, Natural History Museum, London (catalogue numbers 249–57). Unfortunately, none of the remainder has been found.

Saxon material from the excavations on the Hill is held within the Department of Medieval and Modern Europe, British Museum. Tania Dickinson examined and described the Saxon material in her thesis (Dickinson 1976, vol. 2, 215–16).

20th-century investigations

No further excavation was carried out on the site until Grimes' work in the 1950s, but some other investigations took place, fairly casually, over the years. Crawford recorded (1922) finding sarsen boulders within the hillfort rampart and compared it with other hillforts, solely on the basis of poking around with his walking-stick when walking on the hill. Flinders Petrie made a careful survey with tapes (1926) of the White Horse with the assistance of his wife and son as part of his research into the hill figures of England. The Ministry of Works surveyed the Horse in 1936 as the maintenance had passed into the public sector.

Both of these surveys led to new dates being proposed for the origins of the White Horse. Petrie (ibid.) included a suggestion that all the ancient hill figures discussed in his work might be Bronze Age, though the basis of his argument was weak, involving the alignment of the Cerne Abbas Giant on some earthworks of this date. Marples (1949) included the results of his father's 1936 survey in his work on hill figures where he proposed a late Bronze Age or early Iron Age date for the monument based on stylistic comparisons with representations of horses of this date from Scandinavia and North Africa.

W F Grimes carried out excavations of a small part of the White Horse between 1951 and 1953. He was commissioned by the Ministry of Works to lead a team of agricultural workers in restoring the surface of the monument to its former appearance. This followed removal of camouflage that had hidden it from German bombers through the Second World War. Grimes excavated a small trench into a part of the monument out of his own interest at this time. This had not been part of the planned work, but revealed the monument's construction.

Professor Grimes had graduated from the University of Wales before going on to an apprenticeship in Archaeology and Museum work in the National Museum of Wales. Before the outbreak of the Second World War he worked for the Ordnance Survey at Southampton, and was seconded to the Ministry of Works, and worked excavating monuments threatened with destruction on defence sites. During the course of this work Grimes was sent all over the country and reported some of these threatened sites (Grimes 1960), though his work in London was better known. He succeeded Sir Mortimer Wheeler as Director of the London Museum in 1945, but still carried out some work for the Ministry such as the overseeing of the restoration of the White Horse in 1952. Unfortunately, his findings remained unpublished in the Ministry's archives until the present time.