

## PREFACE

The OAU's connection with Barrow Hills is as old as the organisation itself. In 1973, the Unit's birth date, the Abingdon area was the focal point of some of the most intensive archaeological activity in England. Not only was the historic town centre of Abingdon being redeveloped, almost the entire rural hinterland was disappearing beneath the skirts of suburbia and into a new landscape of gravel pits.

In order to evaluate the threats to archaeology and assist its research designs the OAU published a series of surveys. The first of these *The Upper Thames Valley: An Archaeological Survey of the River Gravels* (Benson & Miles 1974) mapped the evidence of aerial photographs. For the first time the Abingdon Causewayed Camp and the Barrow Hills cemetery complex were mapped and their physical relationship to each other and the modern landscape made clear.

Don Benson and I wrote 'The Barton Court Farm/ Barrow Hills area has been subjected to great economic and social pressures, and these are not diminishing.... The Causewayed Camp and, more recently, the Barton Court Farm area have been submerged under the suburban housing estates of rapidly expanding Abingdon. The recent inflation of land prices combined with the demand for housing has acted as a great incentive for the rapid development.... The dangers of the whole area becoming incorporated within suburbia are obviously apparent.'

We went on to predict that, in the then climate of weak legislation and strong pressure on land, a large scale excavation might become a necessary compromise if 'sufficient finds and expertise' were available.

Ten years later this prediction came true. The site of much of the Scheduled Monument of Barrow Hills with its prehistoric mortuary complex, Anglo-Saxon settlement and Romano-British cemetery was sold for housing. With financial support from the Inspectorate of Ancient Monuments (now English Heritage) and in co-operation with Professor Richard Bradley of Reading University the OAU mounted what proved to be one of its most important excavations.

Since the Barrow Hills excavation was completed English archaeology has undergone a minor revolution. The OAU has expanded its range of activities enormously and several of the chief protagonists at Barrow Hills have left the organisation. I must, therefore, congratulate our dedicated (in both senses of the word) post-excavation department for bringing this volume to completion and thank the many specialists who have assisted the OAU in completing a project of such significance to prehistoric archaeology. The second volume, of equal importance for early Medieval archaeology will appear shortly to add to the OAU's growing *Thames Valley Landscapes* series.

David Miles  
Director

## SUMMARY

Area excavations conducted in 1983–5 in advance of housing construction over the W end of the early Bronze Age barrow cemetery at Barrow Hills, close to the Abingdon causewayed enclosure, yielded evidence for ceremonial and funerary use of the complex from the earlier Neolithic to at least the middle Bronze Age. Among the ring ditches known from air photographs were Neolithic pits, Neolithic and Beaker flat graves, pond barrows and a linear early Bronze Age cremation cemetery. The opportunity is taken to review earlier salvage excavations of barrows in the E part of the cemetery, much of which has been quarried away. Together the results of the previous excavations and the 1983–5 seasons make Barrow Hills one of the most fully-excavated round barrow cemeteries in Britain. The whole provides a conspectus of burial and other ritual spanning three thousand years, and a continuous record of local landuse throughout this period.

A series of 52 radiocarbon dates provides a basis for detailed examination of the phasing and layout of the complex, and of the chronology of its artefacts. These include elaborate later Neolithic pit groups, Beaker grave groups — one of which yielded copper ornaments dated to the mid-third millennium cal BC, and 'Wessex Culture' grave groups.

The complex is placed in the context of the topography and contemporary archaeology of the immediate area, and is discussed in the context of regional, British and European developments.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*Excavation*

Thanks are extended to Mr W P Dockar Drysdale, the land owner at the time of the 1983–5 excavations, for permission to excavate as well as for help and hospitality, to Mr B Ford, the then tenant, for his help, and to Kibswell Builders Ltd for their assistance.

The excavations were funded by English Heritage and the Manpower Services Commission. Members of the Archaeology Department of Reading University, the Abingdon Area Archaeological and Historical Society, and the Oxford University Archaeological Society volunteered their labour. Gratitude is expressed to them and to all those who worked on the site.

*Post-excavation*

Post-excavation analysis was funded by English Heritage, whose support is gratefully acknowledged. Arthur MacGregor of the Ashmolean Museum has facilitated work on the finds and the records of earlier fieldwork and aerial photography. All the contributors have worked generously and wholeheartedly towards the completion of the project. Particular thanks are extended to Alister Bartlett, Angela Boyle, Philippa Bradley, Rosamund Cleal, Paul Garwood, Lisa Moffett, Stuart Needham, Karen Nichols, Peter Northover, Adrian Parker, Mark Robinson, Fiona Roe, Dale Serjeantson, Jill Thompson and Jonathan Wallis. The initial radiocarbon measurements were made without

charge by the British Museum Radiocarbon Laboratory through the good offices of Dr Ian Kinnes, as was the most recent measurement (BM-2896), thanks to Dr Stuart Needham. Stuart Needham has also generously read and commented on sections of the text. Janet Ambers and Alex Bayliss kindly recalibrated all radiocarbon dates cited in the original draft in order to achieve consistency in dating and citation throughout the volume.

Vanessa Fell has both undertaken and co-ordinated investigative work on selected artefacts. Anna Cselik of the Ancient Monuments Laboratory has examined a sample of fibres for replaced textile on the knife-dagger from barrow 11. D T Bilton of the Department of Biology, University of York, has kindly attempted a DNA study of possible leather from the same barrow and Chris Doherty of the Oxford University Research Laboratory for Archaeology and the History of Art has undertaken infrared spectroscopy analysis of the same material.

The human bone forms part of the collections of the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, the Duckworth Laboratory at the University of Cambridge (early material only) and the Natural History Museum in London. Angela Boyle would like thank Dr Rob Foley of the Duckworth Laboratory for permission to examine the bone and to obtain radiocarbon determinations on selected samples. Both tasks were facilitated by laboratory technician Maggie Bellati. Robert Kruszynski at the Natural History Museum provided space and facilities for what proved to be the lengthy examination of the human bone housed there and Arthur MacGregor facilitated examination of the human bone in the Ashmolean Museum.

Philippa Bradley would like to thank Frances Healy for discussions about the flint assemblage and particularly for facilitating the computer analysis of the metrical data. Martin Tingle drew her attention to snapped scrapers from the Maddie Farm Project for which she is grateful. Caroline Legal of the Ashmolean Museum kindly provided access to material from the earlier excavations at Radley and the Abingdon causewayed enclosure. Dr Andrew Brown kindly provided primary records of the use-wear analysis that was carried out as part of Dr Liv Gibbs' thesis. Jeff Wallis and Roger Thomas kindly provided information relating to the fieldwalking at Barrow Hills prior to the excavation. She would like to thank Jeff Wallis for discussing many of the Abingdon Archaeological and Historical Society's excavations around Radley.

Dale Serjeantson is grateful to the Natural History Museum for access to comparative collections in the course of identifying a white-tailed eagle bone. Lisa Moffett would like to thank Mark Robinson and Susan Limbrey for their help.

The Ministry of Defence has kindly permitted the publication of Figures 1.7 and 1.8. The Aerial Reconnaissance section of the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England has provided access to aerial photographs and plots. Ival Hornbrook and Susan Lisk of the Oxfordshire Sites and Monuments Record have provided access to information and aerial photographs.

## LOCATION OF ARCHIVE

Most of the finds and records from all episodes of investigation are held by the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. Material from the 1976 excavation of Barrow 2 is held by the Oxfordshire County Museums Service. Human remains from the 1983–5 excavations are held by the Natural History Museum, London. Those from previous investigations are held partly by the Ashmolean Museum, partly by the Duckworth Laboratory, Cambridge.

## NOTES

### *Air Photographs*

References to air photographs are preceded by 'AP' and consist of an abbreviation for the collection to which they belong and the reference number within that collection, eg '(AP RCHME SU 5198/1)'. Abbreviations for collections are

#### CUCAP

Cambridge University Committee for Aerial Photography

#### RCHME

Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England

### *Radiocarbon Determinations*

Radiocarbon results have been calibrated using the 1986 dataset wherever possible (Stuiver and Pearson 1986; Pearson and Stuiver 1986; Pearson *et al* 1986; a bi-decadal weighted average of data from Linick *et al* 1985, Stuiver *et al* 1986, and Kromer *et al* 1986), that is to 7210 cal BC. All determinations which have calibrated ranges stretching earlier than this have been calibrated using the 1993 dataset (Pearson *et al* 1993; Kromer and Becker 1993).

The probabilistic method of calibration (Stuiver and Reimer 1993; Dehling and van der Plicht 1993) has been used, using the program OxCal (v2.18) (Bronk Ramsey 1994; 1995). Frequently the calibrated date ranges for 95% confidence are not contiguous. In these cases the range with the greatest probability has been cited in the text, with the confidence of the range following. The calibrated ranges of all the Radley dates at both 68% and 95% confidence are listed in the table in Appendix 1. All ranges have been rounded outwards to 10 years. In accordance with international convention (Mook 1986), the radiocarbon age and the laboratory number is cited for each date, enabling readers perform their own analysis of the results easily.

### *Human Remains*

The completeness of individuals is expressed by a letter code:

- A Complete or nearly so (100–75%)
- B Incomplete (41–74%)
- C Partial (< 40%)
- X Small fragments only

The preservation of single bones is expressed by a numeric code:

- 1 Complete or easily reconstructible
- 2 Incomplete, more than 50% survival (of epiphyses if recording a long bone)
- 3 Incomplete, less than 50% survival (of epiphyses if recording a long bone)

### *Illustrated Finds*

These are numbered in consecutive sequences within material type, each material type being distinguished by an alphabetic prefix.

The prefixes are

- AB Animal bone
- B Bead
- F Flint
- J Jet
- L Leather
- M Metal
- P Pottery
- S Stone
- WB Worked bone

Dr Andrew Brown's use-wear data is denoted by an asterisk in the flint catalogues, eg '\* cutting/whittling wood on RHS'.

### *Contributors*

In order to improve the layout of the volume and save space, a number of individual author citations, which recur frequently in chapters 3, 4 and 5, have been substituted for letters. Full citations are given in other chapters.

- Alistair Barclay A
- Angela Boyle C
- Philippa Bradley D
- Richard Bradley E
- Rosamund Cleal G
- Martin Cook H
- Paul Garwood I
- Mary Harman J
- John W Hedges L
- Bruce Levitan N
- Stuart Needham O
- Fiona Roe R
- Dale Serjeantson T
- Jonathan Wallis V
- Jacqui Watson W

### *Age of individual contributions*

It should be noted that a considerable amount of time has elapsed between post excavation and report writing and bringing the completed volume to publication. In some cases specialist reports were written in 1986 and 1988, with only limited time available for later revision.

*Contents*

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*Figure 1.1 Location*