



People of the Heath: Understanding & Conserving Petersfield's Prehistoric Barrows

A synopsis of the project

This four-year project is focussed on a remarkable but little-known prehistoric monument complex on the edge of Petersfield Town dating to the Early Bronze Age, between 2200 and 1500 BC. Although designated as Scheduled Ancient Monuments, the large group of barrows (burial and ritual monuments) spread across Petersfield Heath has seen no active research since it was mapped in the 1930s and there is no record at all of any past excavations. Yet it is one of the most impressive and diverse barrow cemeteries to have survived in south-east England, boasting at least 21 monuments representing five or six different types. An unknown number of barrows are no longer discernible, having been lost to development, erosion and scrub growth. The size and diversity of the Heath complex invite comparison with better known barrow cemeteries in Wessex, for example, those well preserved around Stonehenge. This begs a host of questions about why the locality became important in this period and the extent to which it was influenced by developments in other regions.

Bronze Age barrows are well known to be repositories of the dead and, because burials can occur almost anywhere within and around such monuments, it is possible that we will encounter some during the project. However, finding burials is not a primary objective. The project is more generally about the *People of the Heath* – those who designed, constructed and venerated these lasting monuments; it is about how the barrows were built, in what sequence, and what they meant to the community; furthermore, it is about where the people lived, what food they grew, how they utilised their environment and what impact they had on it. In addition, though, this is a project for the benefit of the *modern People of the Heath* – the present-day Petersfield community that nurtures and enjoys this special and focal landscape.

Research goals

The main research goals of the project are as follows. Under each heading one or more questions are posed to serve as examples – there is no guarantee that we will be able to draw conclusions on all of them.

- *Cemetery evolution*: seek good dating evidence to build up a picture of how the barrow cemetery evolved over its duration, probably lasting some centuries; can we identify an early core from which the complex spread? Can anything be deduced about the frequency of barrow construction and whether it was evenly spread through time?
- *Monument type*: gain insights into the particular significance of the different forms of monument; do they relate to chronology, function or the status of the interred?
- *Environmental history*: chart the evolution of the environment of the Heath in terms of vegetation, soil character and hydrology; when was the land cleared of its presumed original post-glacial woodland? Was the soil more fertile in the Neolithic and Bronze Age? Was the marshy area that was converted into the pond in the eighteenth century already wet ground in prehistory? Can any relationship be observed between cemetery use and environmental change?
- *Constructional resources*: discover what building materials were used for the monuments; did they come from the immediate spot or from further away? Why were they chosen? Are there implications for the organisation of the labour or where people were living?
- *Food economy*: seek palaeoenvironmental remains from well stratified deposits that indicate the crops grown and the extent of grassland, both in the immediate environs of the Heath and further afield; were the crops chosen to suit the environment? Is there any evidence for the types of livestock kept or for grazing pressure on the environment?

- *Choice of location, the 'catchment' of the complex and its external relations:* research the similarities and differences between this complex and contemporary ones both within the region and beyond; factors such as size, diversity, topographic and environmental setting and spacing between barrow sites will be relevant; why did the Heath become such a special place for Early Bronze Age communities? How big a region was it serving? Is there a particular affinity with complexes in Wessex or anywhere else? If so, what was the significance of that connection?

In addition to the barrows, scatters of prehistoric worked flints are also known from the locality. While some may be contemporary with the barrows, others represent much earlier times. This is the case, for example, for the flintwork site found on the north side of the Heath during golf-green construction in 1900 which is believed to be of Mesolithic date. It too will be investigated as part of the project to see what survives.

In later history, the Heath has served many purposes, including peat digging, grazing and, more latterly, a wide range of leisure pursuits, including golfing and tennis. Since medieval times the Taro Fair has been held on the Heath, making it a focal point for the community. Today it is a much used and valued local asset, with notable activities being angling, boating, cricket, child-recreation and dog-walking. These later types of use are also relevant to our project, both in their own right and because they may have affected what survives from earlier times.

Project management

The project is hosted by Petersfield Museum and overseen by an Executive Committee of five members – Two Trustees of the Museum, the Museum's Curator and the two Archaeologists appointed to undertake the field campaign and associated research. The Executive Committee is in regular consultation with a range of interested parties who are represented on an Advisory Committee (see Project Structure Diagram). It is a four-year project (April 2014 – March 2018) supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund (£100,000) and the South Downs National Park Authority (Sustainable Community's Fund, £20,000). In addition a grant of £500 has been awarded by East Hampshire District Council (Approved-By-You Fund) towards on-site information.

The programme is full and varied and a number of components offer opportunities for interested members of the public to participate.

Getting involved – activities & research

- *Clearance of vegetation and habitat management:* Many of the monuments on the Heath have become overgrown during the latter half of the twentieth century and it is an objective to clear these of all but mature trees and then maintain them under grass to enhance viewing and minimise further root damage. Clearance programmes are managed by *Petersfield Town Council* (the owners of the Heath, which is managed by a Trust) in conjunction with the *Friends of Petersfield Heath* who will welcome any offers of help. Most clearance is undertaken during the dormant season, from autumn onwards.
- *Geophysical surveys:* These will take place twice a year under the guidance of experienced surveyors, Neville and Mary Haskins, using state-of-the-art instruments for resistivity surveying. Particular areas of the Heath will be targeted to clarify the nature of known sites and seek hidden, as yet unknown features. Volunteers are welcome to sign up to participate in these surveys.
- *Topographic survey:* A detailed topographic map of the whole of the Heath will be compiled by a professional surveyor, Charles Fanshawe, using the latest surveying techniques. While the main survey does not require voluntary assistance, Charles will in the future be giving two demonstrations of the techniques involved.
- *Archaeological excavations:* A number of the known monuments will be sampled by excavation – most of these are Scheduled Ancient Monuments and require permission from English

Heritage. In addition, the project will investigate previously unknown or ill-defined sites on the Heath, as well as a known flintwork site. There will be six three-week seasons of excavation, headed by George Anelay of West Sussex Archaeology, the first in September 2014, two in each of 2015 & 2016, and the last in the spring of 2017. Excavations will be designed to find out as much as possible about the structure, dating and contemporary environment of each site with as little destruction as possible. Sites will be restored to their pre-excavation state. Volunteers, including complete novices, are encouraged to sign up for excavations, although places will be limited to 16 people on any one day.

- *Post-excavation analysis:* Most of the post-excavation work will need to be undertaken by trained archaeologists, including specialists in various fields (e.g. pottery of a particular period). Opportunities for volunteer involvement will depend on what is found during the project. Any necessary conservation of artefacts will be undertaken by the Conservation Service of the Hampshire Museums Service.
- *Regional survey:* In order to get the best understanding of this prehistoric complex, it is necessary to review comparable and complementary evidence from the period in a wider region. The review will take stock of all evidence for the Neolithic and Bronze Age periods in the Rother Valley and surrounding landscapes. This research will largely be an academic exercise undertaken by Stuart Needham in collaboration with the archaeological services of the relevant planning authorities (Hampshire, Chichester District, West Sussex, Surrey & South Downs National Park Authority); however, there may be some opportunities for assistance from those with a strong interest.
- *Documentary research:* Although the prehistoric complex is the main focus of our research, the project also aims to collate as much information as possible about the later history of the Heath – how it was used at different times and how the landscape evolved. To complement written histories, a wide range of documentary sources are being consulted, including early maps, legal documents, photographs (ground-level and aerial), paintings and drawings, postcards, newspaper articles, town archives etc. The recollections of local people will also play a part. The end result will be a rich dossier of information available for all to consult which will also help us to determine the extent to which the prehistoric complex has been altered by later activities. If you think you may have information which is not widely known, please bring it to the attention of the Documentary Research Group, led by Peter Price & Rob Banbury.
- *Schools participation:* Special sessions are being organised for school parties (by prior booking) by Amanda Harwood, the education and outreach officer at Petersfield Museum. There will be at least six sessions per excavation.
- *Palaeoenvironmental research:* This is a concurrent programme to be funded separately from the *People of the Heath* project, but its aims are intimately linked. It will be managed by Nick Branch, a leading expert in palaeoenvironmental studies at the Department of Archaeology, Reading University. Samples taken from both the excavations on the Heath and selected other spots in the local landscape will be analysed for a range of environmental remains (e.g. pollen, charred plant fragments, snails) from ancient deposits. Meanwhile, the character of the soils will be investigated by Matt Canti of English Heritage. The combined results should tell us much about past vegetation and its evolution, including aspects of how prehistoric people used the Heath and its environs (settlement pattern, grazing, arable farming).
- *Documenting the project:* In addition to systematic recording of activities and those who participate, there will be both photographic and artistic renderings of the project in progress. We welcome artists of all kinds to observe and gain inspiration from project activities. Please contact Kathrin Pieren if you need any information.

Getting informed – modes of dissemination

- *Bulletins and press releases:* After each significant phase of the project a bulletin will be issued to the press and posted on the Museum's website.
- *Excavation tours:* Each working day of an excavation season (Tuesday to Saturday, three weeks duration) there will be a brief tour of the excavations by George Anelay at 4.30pm. It is not

necessary to book, but please consult the Museum website or the Heath notice-boards for the current rendezvous.

- *Site tours at other times:* In each year of the project until April 2017 there will be six tours of the site complex outside of the excavation seasons, guided by either Stuart Needham or George Anelay. [Be aware that there may be similar tours organised by other bodies.]
- *Regional Museum visits:* In collaboration with the relevant museum curators, Stuart Needham will lead behind-the-scenes museum visits – one per annum for the first three years. The museums concerned will have significant later prehistoric material from the region. Please watch the Museum website for notice of dates; it will be necessary to book places which will be limited.
- *Regional site visits:* There will be guided tours of a selection of other archaeological landscapes with significant later prehistoric sites – two per annum, led by either Stuart Needham or George Anelay. Please watch the Museum website for notice of dates; it will be necessary to book places.
- *Dissemination & correspondence:* All information issued by the project will appear on the Museum's website. In addition, museum staff – Kathrin Pieren & Amanda Harwood - will field any enquiries about the project using both conventional and electronic (email, facebook, twitter) media.
- *Lectures & conference:* The ongoing progress of the project will be communicated to both general audiences and specialist academic ones at regular intervals. There will be a minimum of six lectures over three years (up to April 2017), at least one per annum being to a local venue in Petersfield or the surrounding areas. Some of these may require booking; please consult the Museum website. A multi-speaker conference is planned for the conclusion of the project in spring 2018; it will be held in Petersfield.
- *Notice-boards:* A general poster on the project will appear on notice-boards on Petersfield Heath; this will direct the reader to the Museum's website and notice-board, both of which will be kept up-to-date with the latest information.
- *Exhibitions:* At the end of the project Petersfield Museum will put on an exhibition presenting the overall results of the project. Any displays in the interim will depend on results at the time. [Note that there will be a relevant exhibition on the rich history of the Heath in autumn 2014 as part of Petersfield Museum's on-going exhibitions programme].

Project legacy

- *Improved site management:* One of our main goals is to learn more about the character and condition of the archaeological remains on the Heath in order to feed back better advice on how best to manage them. In this way we hope to improve both the visitor experience and long-term conservation of this fine archaeological landscape.
- *Enhanced knowledge:* We hope to gather much new information and, by considering other contemporary sites in the region, to translate this into an improved understanding of what these monuments meant to their builders and users. Moreover, we hope to learn something of these currently shadowy prehistoric people – where they lived and how they conducted their lives
- *Enhanced public appreciation:* The project is also about increasing awareness of the archaeological significance of Petersfield Heath and its significance; we want the complex to be lodged securely in the public eye.
- *Archaeological trail:* At the conclusion of the project a sign-boarded trail will guide people around the barrow cemetery, pointing out some of the major features.
- *Ongoing programme of site tours:* The site tours started during the project will be continued thereafter (from May 2017 onwards) using trained-up volunteer guides. Please leave your details with the Museum if you are interested in becoming a volunteer guide.
- *Guide leaflet:* Towards the end of the programme, a leaflet will be written summarising the main features and interpretations of the Heath complex. This will be distributed via the Museum, Town Council, local visitor accommodation etc.
- *Schools information pack:* A school information pack will be produced, suitable for consumption by youngsters (via their teachers)

- *Publication:* The full results of the *People of the Heath* project will be drawn together in an academically rigorous, but readable text (printed book & on-line) authored by the project archaeologists and all involved specialists
- *Accessible archives:* Various archives will be generated over the course of the project – primary excavation records, the recovered finds assemblage, detailed analyses of findings; a compilation of documentary records, a record of the project itself (photographic, participants etc). These will all be available for on-going consultation at appropriate public institutions – notably Petersfield Museum and the Hampshire Museums Service.

If you are interested in participating, watch the Petersfield Museum website for details of forthcoming activities: www.petersfieldmuseum.co.uk. If any of the activities covered above does not yet appear on the website, please be patient; plenty of advance notice will be given.

For information about the education programme please contact the Education and Outreach Officer, Amanda Harwood, on 01730 260756 or education@petersfieldmuseum.co.uk

All other enquiries relating to the project should be directed to the Museum; they will be re-directed if necessary:

Petersfield Museum, The Old Courthouse, St Peters Road, Petersfield, GU32 3HX
01730 262601 or curator@petersfieldmuseum.co.uk (Curator Kathrin Pieren)

People of the Heath Executive Committee
July 2014

‘People of the Heath’ is supported by



EHDC ‘Approved by you’ Grant