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1st of May 2012- This picture was taken outside Salisbury Cathedral shortly after Her Majesty had been presented with the selection of Mesolithic tools discovered at Vespasian's Camp by our team.

## SUMMARY OF AA309 AND U211 STUDENTS' FIELD WORK AT VESPASIAN'S CAMP, NEAR STONEHENGE, WILTSHIRE, 2005-2011



Vespasian's Camp is to the left of the monument, facing the tree clump.

David Jacques, a tutor on *Culture, Identity and Power in the Roman Empire* (AA309) and U211, describes the results of ten small excavations he directed with over 100 of his students at Amesbury, Wiltshire, 2005 - 2011. The work has resulted in the discovery of a site, situated about a mile from Stonehenge, which has been described as being "potentially one of the pivotal places in the history of the Stonehenge landscape" by an inspection team from English Heritage. The uncovering of the earliest settlement ever found in the Stonehenge landscape is the stand out discovery, but the fact that the site also provides evidence for ritual activity in the Neolithic, Bronze Age, Iron Age and Romano-British periods, and possibly beyond, means that a rare and special 'multi phase' site has been discovered.

These excavations were carried out with support made available through David's Research Associate award (2004-08), further OU Associate Lecturer Development funding 2008-10, and grants from Amesbury Town Council (2009 - present) and English Heritage (2011). David received an Open University Teaching Award for 2010 and has used the cash prize from that to support further work on this project.

### UPDATES FROM 2011

#### Contexts to the discoveries

Simply because of its geographical location Vespasian's Camp might have been expected to have had some cultural and phenomenological significance in the prehistoric and early historical periods (see OS map below) The hill on which it stands rises to around 95 metres above sea level and, through its history, it would have had excellent intervisibility with important prehistoric and historic monuments and sites to all points of the compass in the Stonehenge landscape. It also commanded extensive views of the river Avon. But until our small scale excavations the place had received very little academic attention. Why?



OS Map of the area around Vespasians' Camp and Stonehenge: Vespasian's Camp is on the bend of the river Avon, at the place marked 'fort'.

Despite being a scheduled monument on account of it being an Iron Age hill fort, Vespasian's Camp's archaeological potential only began to be revealed after my detailed research of the site's Estate and nearby farm records, which on and off took six years between 1999-2005. This investigation revealed that the widespread assumptions about the extent of the 18th century landscaping of the area had been wrong, and had led to mistaken assumptions that the areas earlier archaeology had been largely destroyed by it. The fact that the site has been in private hands since Tudor times, and that successive landowners have been understandably keen to safeguard the tranquillity and beauty of the place, also helped to create and reinforce the conditions where Vespasian's Camp became an archaeological blind spot. Our field work started in 2005 after Sir Edward and Lady Antrobus, the site's owners, kindly agreed to a

meeting on site between me and their Site Custodian Mike Clarke. Mike is a key player in this story because having worked on the site for over 30 years he really knows the land. For many years he had had astute observations about the landscape and wanted a number of questions, which were essentially archaeological ones, answered. We got on very well in that first meeting, and have since, and after whittling six possible targets down to one, Mike agreed to allow a small team of 20 to test pit and survey the Blick Mead area, which lies outside of the Scheduled Monument, in the north east corner of the Camp. This work went on over a long weekend in the autumn of 2005, and the results pointed to the area having serious archaeological potential. We have been invited back to dig there, and to survey other areas of the Camp, every year since, and are the first team to ever be invited back more than once to Vespasian's Camp.



The spring at Blick Mead

### The discoveries

Our field work started in earnest 2005. Including the weekend dig last September 2011, we have had 28 days on site, and many OU students, their families, local residents from Amesbury, friends and experts have supported the project. Below is a summary of our most important discoveries.

We have uncovered a massive amount of prehistoric worked flint and burnt flint in and around the spring, spanning at least the mid Mesolithic to the early Bronze Age periods (@6250-2000BC), and much bone, so far dating from the Mesolithic.

The discovery of the Mesolithic material is really significant and has been described as of "at least national importance" by Barry Bishop of the British Lithics Society. In 2 trenches, measuring 6 by 4 and 2 by 2 metres, we have found around 9000 pieces of worked flint, along with 1000 pieces of burnt flint and more than 200 pieces of bone. Much of this bone is from aurochs (Chris Faine, Oxford Archaeology East), an aurochs was a very large, now extinct, ox, and some of it appears to have been cooked. Barry Bishop says that the indications are that the deposits of worked flint carry on for "hundreds of metres more".



Mike and Gilly Clarke, the Custodians of Vespasian's Camp, at one of our OU dig Saturday 'curry nights' in 'Tandoori Nights' in Amesbury.

My earlier examination of the property deeds and the Estate records of the Blick Mead area had in fact revealed that it hadn't been part of Charles Bridgman's 18th century landscaping plans at all. Indeed the water feature at Blick Mead, hitherto assumed to have been an 18th century pond, was identified by our geologist, Peter Hoare, as an ancient spring, and the largest of a complex of springs in the immediate area. Springs have the potential for excellent preservation conditions, and with this one's close proximity to other archaeological sites, as well the fact that springs are increasingly being regarded as 'special places' in the early landscape, it was clearly the best target for a close investigation in my view.

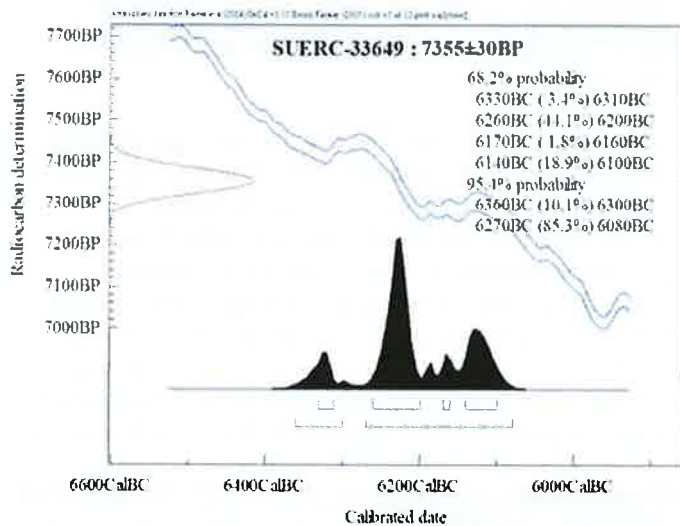
We have since learned from Reading University's Nick Branch, whose team from April 2012 are joining us and leading the environmental science investigations at the site, that this spring was once part of a seasonal lake, which only adds to the interest...



Starting to dig Trench 19 - where later a large amount of Mesolithic material, as well as the 'ducks', came from. Students are being supervised by Tom Phillips of Oxford East Archaeology unit (right)



The Auroch's rootless tooth which we obtained the first Mesolithic C14 date from (see below).



The C14 date of the auroch's - around 6250BC. This is the fourth earliest carbon date ever found in the Stonehenge environs and the earliest associated with a settlement.

The flints are being currently examined in detail and catalogued by Barry Bishop as a result of a grant from the Wiltshire Unitary Authority. Very excitingly, his interim report says that we have found evidence for a rare type of Mesolithic domestic site termed a 'Homebase', a residential site, where families lived "semi permanently" in a place which was "repeatedly revisited". The two carbon dates obtained so far suggest this site was settled between 6250-4700BC, though there are tool types in the assemblage which might date the site back to the 9th millennium! It also seems to have been an important place for ritual and feasting over this period. Barry's report also notes that we may have discovered a man made flint platform/jetty, perhaps from a late Mesolithic context. Nick Branch has suggested that this feature would have been likely to be in the deeper pool areas and perhaps would have been revealed seasonally when the water levels dropped. The spring/seasonal lake seems to have been marked up as a special place for activities; activities which may well have attracted people from outside of the immediate area?



Mesolithic Tools - note the sharp edges and points, and their all round excellent preservation.

Overall, the material we have found presents us with a huge question: Could our site be one of the reasons why Stonehenge is sited where it is? The carbon dating of the site is of particular significance because it dates this settlement as being the oldest one ever found in the Stonehenge area. A further excitement is that it is broadly contemporary with the enigmatic 'totem poles' pits, found underneath Stonehenge car park and dated to the Mesolithic, which are the only previous evidence for this period in the landscape. The provenance, and some of the typology, of the flints found suggests that they came from outside of the Stonehenge area. Were people coming from a distance to work, worship and feast at this site in the Mesolithic and the site in the Stonehenge carpark, foreshadowing what happened later at Stonehenge and Durrington Walls?

Nearby the so called 'Bluestonehenge' monument (constructed around 3000BC) has a spring immediately adjacent to it, which was formed at around the same time, and as a result of very similar geological conditions and processes, as ours at Blick Mead. This raises another tantalising question - were ancient springs on Salisbury Plain very early sites of veneration? Did practices in and around them later become monumentalised in the Neolithic?

Our team is the first to notice the potential significance of Bluestonehenge being placed by a spring, and the first to notice and pose this broader question about the importance of springs in the immediate area.



John Gibbens flanked by Oxford East site supervisors Tom Lyons (left) and Tom Phillips (right) in trench 19



The moment of discovery - a Mesolithic tool being uncovered for the first time in @8000 years

2. Alongside the spring, English Heritage Inspectors David McOmish, David Field and Mark Bowden identified a multi phase field system whose origins lie in the Bronze Age and which continued in use throughout the Romano British period. Subsequent excavation of this area by AA309 students and Amesbury residents in 2010 confirmed this identification as being completely accurate.

3. A copper alloy Bronze Age dagger, which was refashioned from a mid Bronze Age sword called a rapier, was a notable find in 2009, and last year a further piece of mid Bronze Age metalwork was found. This has been identified by David Barrowclough of Cambridge University as part of a chisel. The find of these pieces suggests the spring was a place of ritual and weapon deposition around 1400BC. David Barrowclough says that it "is highly likely there is more Bronze Age metalwork in the form of a hoard in the spring". Professor Richard Bradley of Reading University, who recently visited the site with his colleague Nick Branch, also thinks this likely.



Copper alloy Bronze Age dagger (note the chevron – upside down 'V' engraving mid blade). David Barrowclough, of Wolfson College, Cambridge University, analysis of the 'story' behind this blade was a "master class of deduction".

4. A seven year old girl discovered two 'duck' looking pieces of flint together in the spring in trench 19 in 2010. There is some debate as to whether they were deliberately shaped, or shaped due to natural processes, but all the experts agree that they were likely to be representational objects which were chosen for special deposition. Waterfowls are a feature of late Bronze Age and

Iron Age ritual iconography and suggest veneration of some form of fertility/healing Goddess, such as the duck imagery associated with the worship of the Goddess Sequana found at an Iron Age shrine, later a Roman temple, at a springhead in the Loire Valley.



The 'ducks'.

5. The team have also found an Iron Age pottery assemblage from badger throws along the western ramparts of the Camp which pushes the occupation of the hill fort into the later Iron Age period and closer to the time of the Roman conquest. Some of this pottery might have come from over 50 miles away, according to Lorraine Mephram of Wessex Archaeology, which suggests the fort might have been an important centre for trade and people movement in the later Iron Age.



Roman 'curse' trench with AA309 students

6. The discovery of a likely Romano British curse in the spring, opened by Dana Goodburn Brown, but found to not have any writing in it, adds to our sense that this site was still seen as a special place for depositing ritual items in the Roman period. The ways the Romans reacted to the ancient monuments around Salisbury Plain is of increasing interest and this piece of evidence is tantalising as it suggests a close by Romano British temple, which might relate to the Romano British villa found recently in the nearby Countess area of Amesbury. Our site has a likely significant Romano-British context waiting to be discovered.

7. The finds of a 5th century Anglo Saxon Disc brooch from a nearby spring (Chester Kadwell), and medieval wooden staves from the main spring (Pryor and Taylor), connect the site to the early Anglo Saxon and Amesbury Abbey periods and add to the picture of the Blick Mead area being a place associated with veneration for the very long duree. It is likely to be one of the oldest continuously used such sites in Great Britain.



The early Anglo Saxon disc brooch (5th C) which Mary Kadwell Chester says still carries Roman design elements.

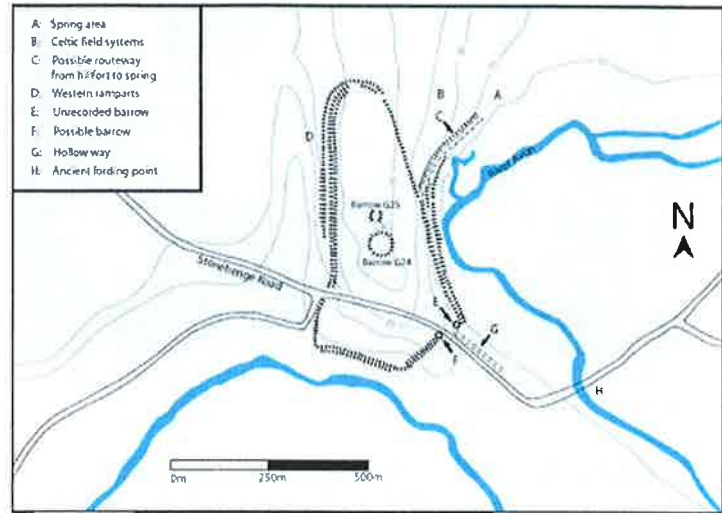


A very happy Cllr Westmoreland and Julia Cleave in the finds tent

### CONCLUDING THOUGHTS - VESPASIAN'S CAMP: TIME AFTER TIME

Before our work there was no evidence for the Camp and its surrounds playing a significant part in the Salisbury Plain ritual landscape in any period. Though our budget has been tiny, our research effort and team work has produced spectacular results which have led the English Heritage team to describe Vespasian's Camp as potentially the "fulcrum of the landscape" in the prehistoric and early historic periods. All of the Open University students' hard work on site has been crucial to the success of the project, as have the contributions of increasingly large numbers of Amesbury residents who have participated alongside them. There has been such a wonderful synergy between the town of Amesbury, the OU students and colleagues from other places. As a result we have started to reveal a much more significant story of Vespasian's Camp's place in the landscape, and a special

place at Blick Mead, which may have been the focus for ritual and veneration for 9 millennia.



The Map of our work on the site 2005-2011: Vespasian's Camp and environs, showing features discussed in text. Contours in metres.

I would like to thank Sir Edward and Lady Antrobus so much for allowing us to work on their private property, which is such a magical place. I also want to thank Hugh Beattie, David Thomas, Janet Huskinson, Trish Cashen of the Open University and each one of the over 100 of our students from the OU for all their interest and input.

Amesbury Town Council and the Amesbury Area Board deserve the utmost credit for supporting our work and linking it with the needs of the town. In particular, Cllr Fred Westmoreland and Mayor Andy Rhind Tutt have been especially supportive and can do about the project. Without them a really important part of Amesbury's and Stonehenge's history wouldn't have been found and there would be no 'Brown Badge for Amesbury's Historic status', as awarded in 2011, or new museum, land bought for 2012. They and the town council team have been very helpful and far sighted. We are also very grateful for the contributions of Amesbury local people, in particular Mike and Rosemary Hewitt, Norman Parker and Peter Goodhugh of the Amesbury Society, Richard Crook, and Julie Bromilow and Pete Kinge of the Qinetiq group. The Amesbury Girls Brigade has also provided sterling help at every talk I have given in Amesbury, and on site, and staff at 'The George' and 'Tandoori Nights' have always been friendly and hospitable. The contribution of local resident Tim Roberts has been especially important to our work since 2005 and we are very lucky to have him as a core member of the team. Talking of which; John Gibbens boundless support and non linear thinking has impressed us all on site too, as have the contributions of Mike Snowden, Mick and Chris Smith and friends from East Norfolk College.



A Mesolithic blade Tool just as it came out of the ground – note how sharp the edge still is!

On every dig, and at all the key post excavation stages, we have been very lucky to have benefited from the great and lightly worn expertise of site supervisors Tom Phillips and Tom Lyons of Oxford Archaeology East. They have generously passed on their knowledge to so many volunteers, and in such ways that everyone has felt valued and listened to. On behalf of all those who have worked on site, thank you for everything 'the Toms'. David Barrowclough of Cambridge University has also been an insightful advisor and most important friend to this project. His analysis of the Bronze Age dagger and the 'ducks' were master classes in deduction and imagination, and his enthusiasm and support is keenly appreciated. Sue Oosthuizen, Mary Chester Kadwell, Henry Hurst of Cambridge University have also made important and generous contributions to the work. Dave McOmish, Dave Field and Mark Bowden from English Heritage thrilled us with their ideas and understanding of the site when they visited it for four hours in 2010 and have remained imaginative contributors of ideas since. Maisie Taylor, Francis Pryor and Peter Hoare have also made very valuable identifications of site dynamics and artefacts. Without Matt Westmoreland's expert digging we wouldn't have had any trenches to work in – thank you very much for your skills Matt.

We are also very glad to welcome the team from Reading University's Archaeology Department to the project from this Easter 2012.



Auroch's clavicle vertebra.

As well as the support from the OU and the ATC this project has also been fortunate to receive financial support from the following people and organisations – Wiltshire Unitary Authority, Wolfson College Cambridge, English Heritage, Beth and Bob Jacques, John and Sarah Gibbens, The Qinetiq group (Amesbury) and the Land Registry. I'd also like to thank the Fulbright Commission (USA) for giving me the chance to think the ideas through in the first place in Florida 1996-1997, Wolfson College Cambridge for giving me the best possible environment to work on them (thank you Gordon and Faith), and Kate Ayres of Ely Museum for imaginatively providing the first space to exhibit the artefacts which resulted from them! Jane Cuthbert, and Nelson Cuthbert Jacques, who has provided lovely fresh air in our lives, have my love and thanks for all their understanding and support, which has included allowing some of our family funds to be 'invested' in the project.



OU students and Amesbury residents walking along the Cursus after a day of digging.

Lastly, thank you to Mike and Gilly Clarke, the 'custodians' of Vespasian's Camp, who have made all the digs possible, become good friends and who have helped at every stage with enthusiasm, kindnesses and their sense of place. It has been Mike's love for the land he tends which has provided key stimulus for this project and the discoveries at Vespasian's Camp would not have happened without him.

Photo credits: Mayor Andy Rhind Tutt, Cllr Fred Westmoreland, Tom Lyons and David Jacques.