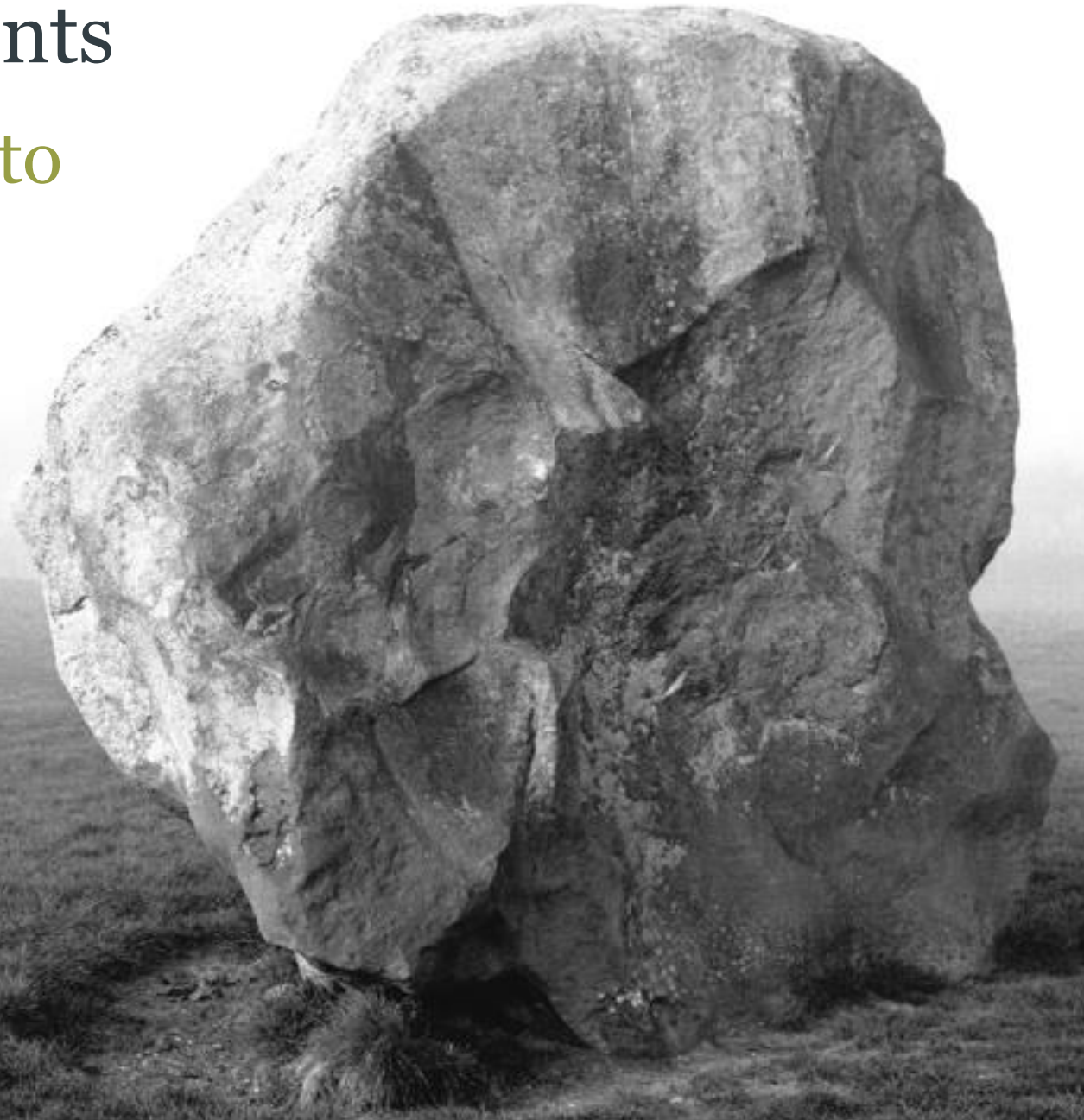


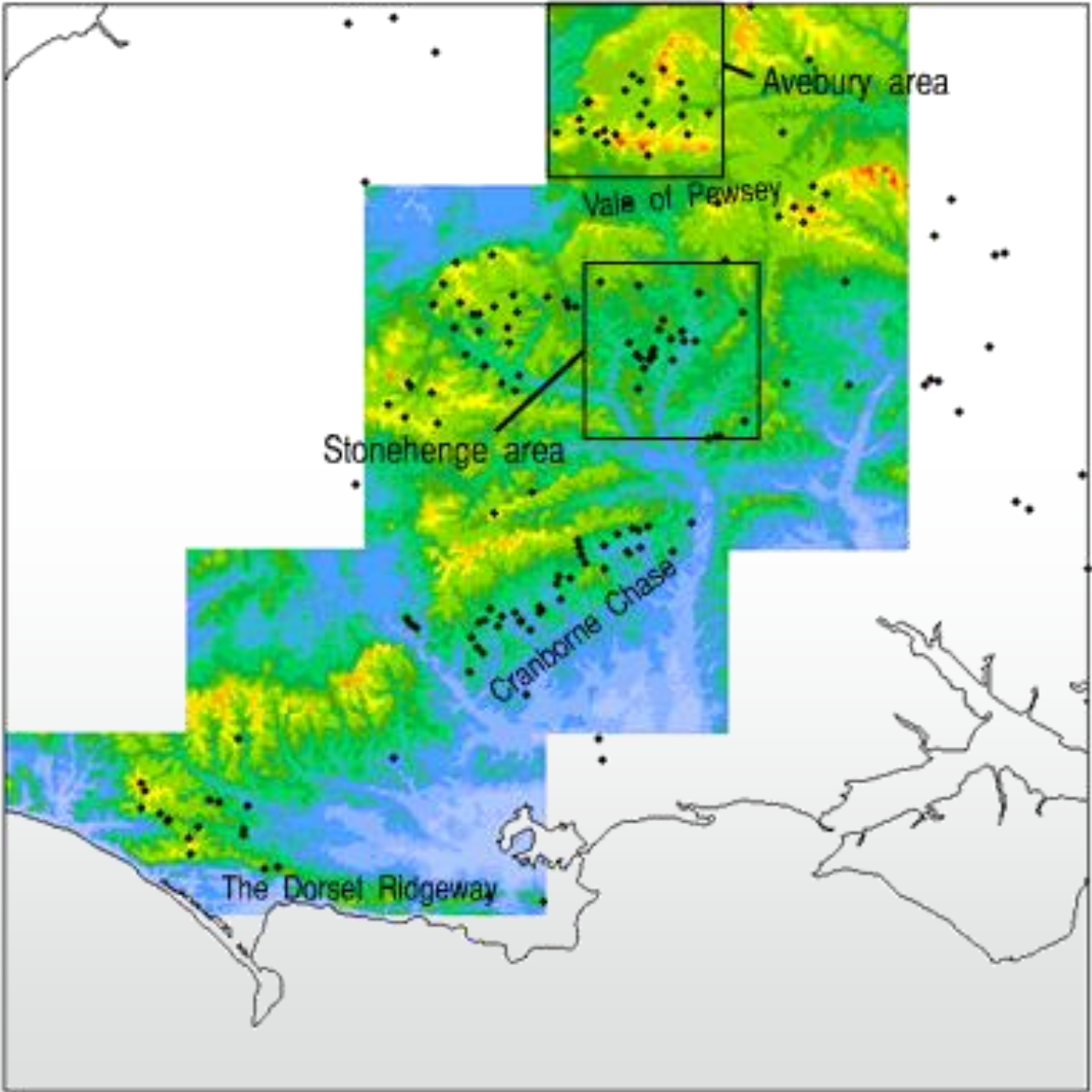
# The Age<sup>S</sup> of Great Monuments

## Avebury as myth and memento

David Wheatley  
University of Southampton  
[dww@soton.ac.uk](mailto:dww@soton.ac.uk)



# Avebury, Wiltshire, England

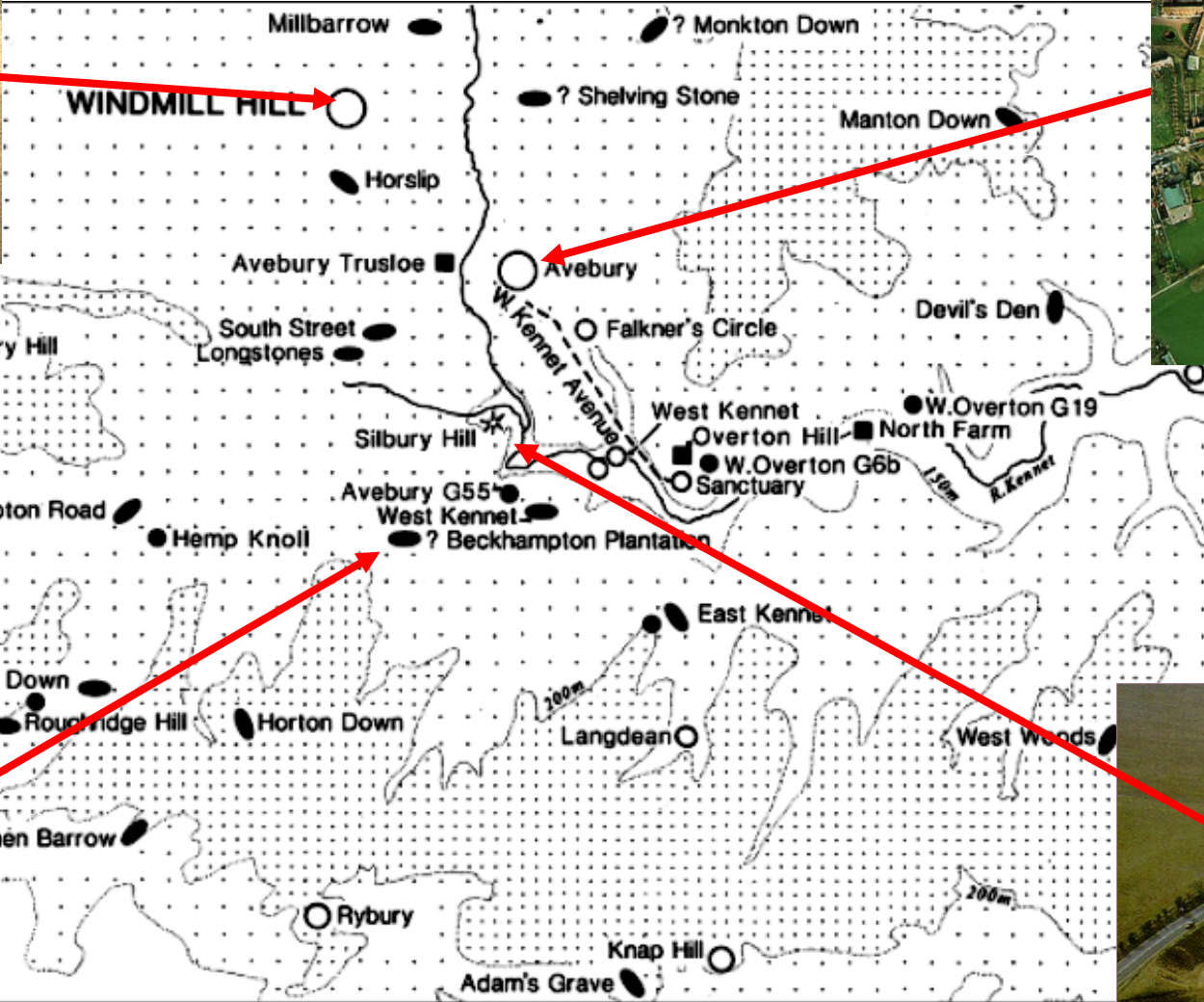




# Village and Monument











What were the great monuments like originally?

What were they for?

Were they planned, if so by who?

Do monuments have ‘Biographies’?



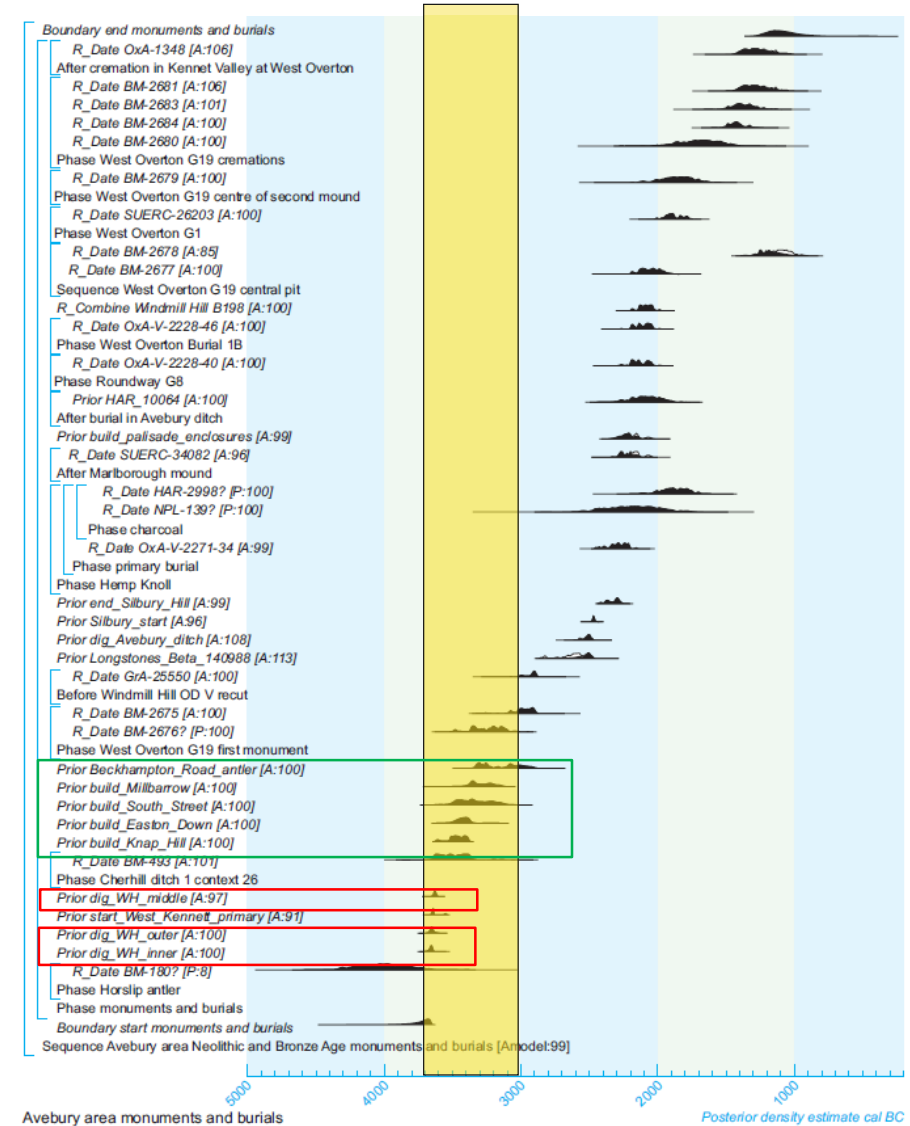
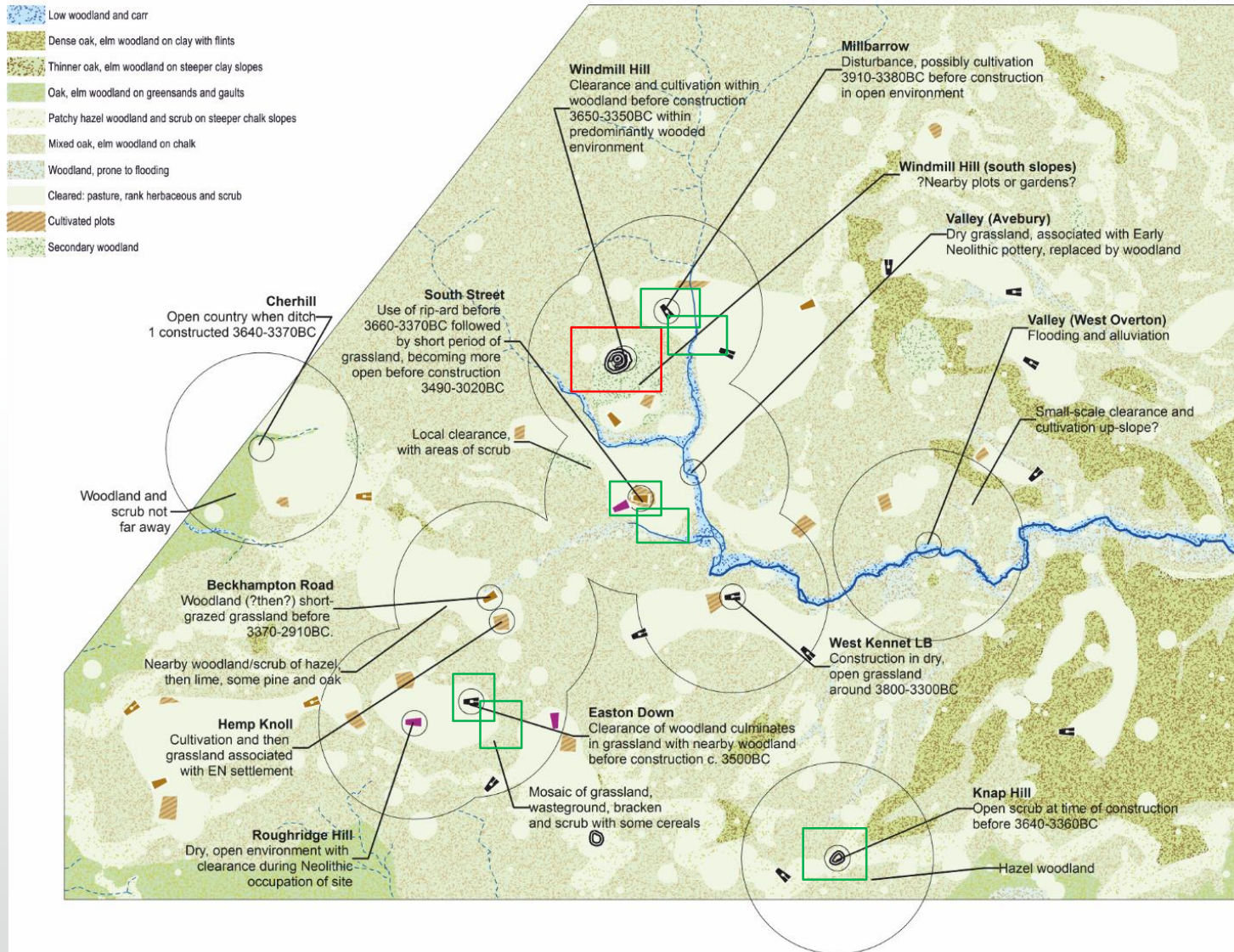
# Memento versus memory



- *Memento* (Christopher Nolan, 2000)
- Leonard Shelby (Guy Pearce), Anterograde Amnesia
- Creates 'traces' to inform his future self:
  - Polaroids
  - Tattoos
  - Notes, encoding his intentions



# Early Neolithic (c. 3700-3000BC)





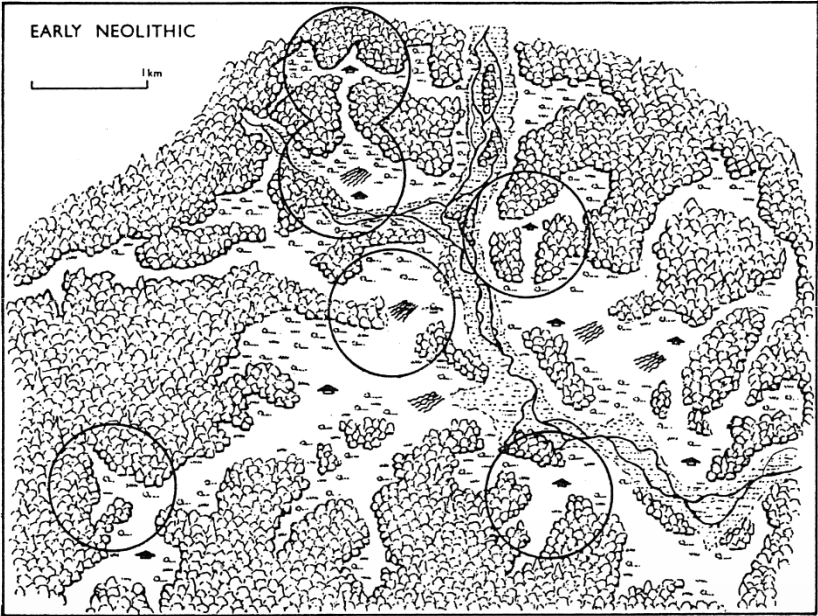


Fig. 50  
Schematic reconstruction of the early neolithic landscape of the Avebury region

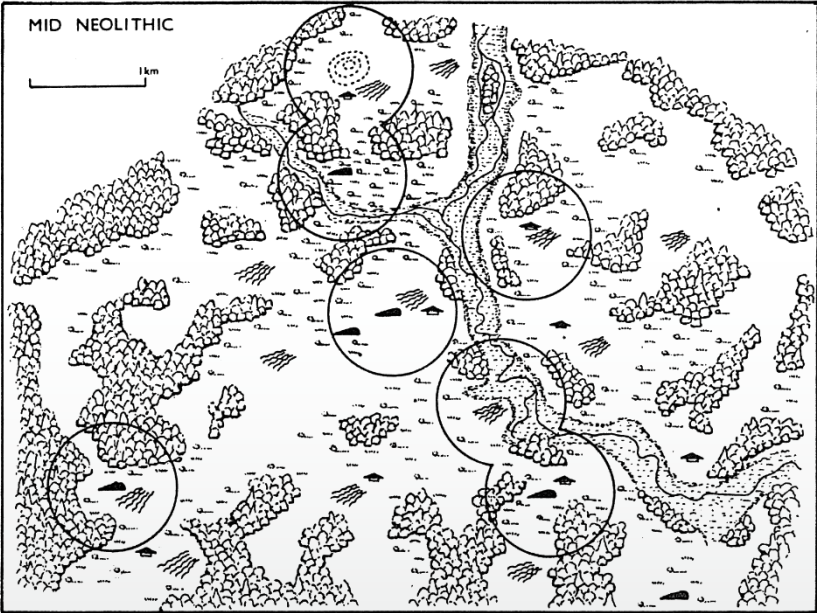


Fig. 51  
Schematic reconstruction of the middle neolithic landscape of the Avebury region

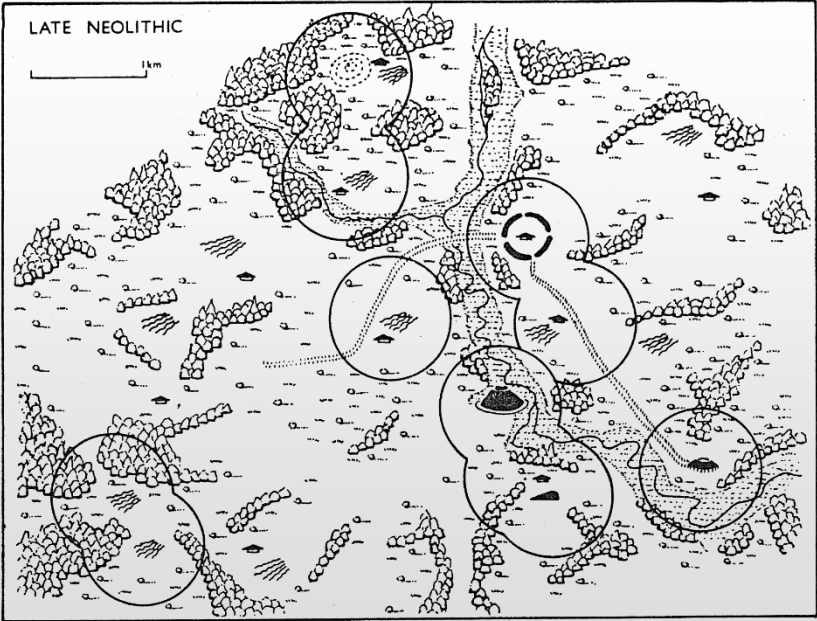
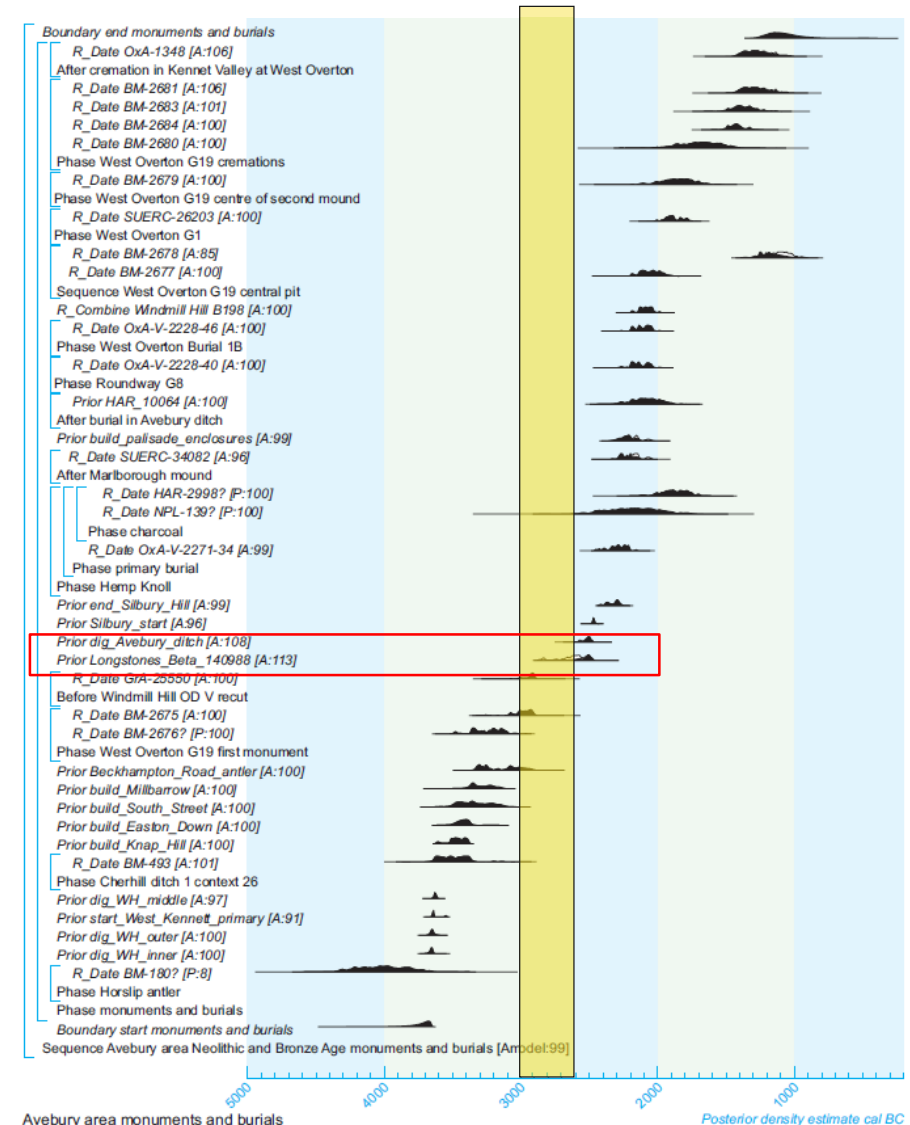
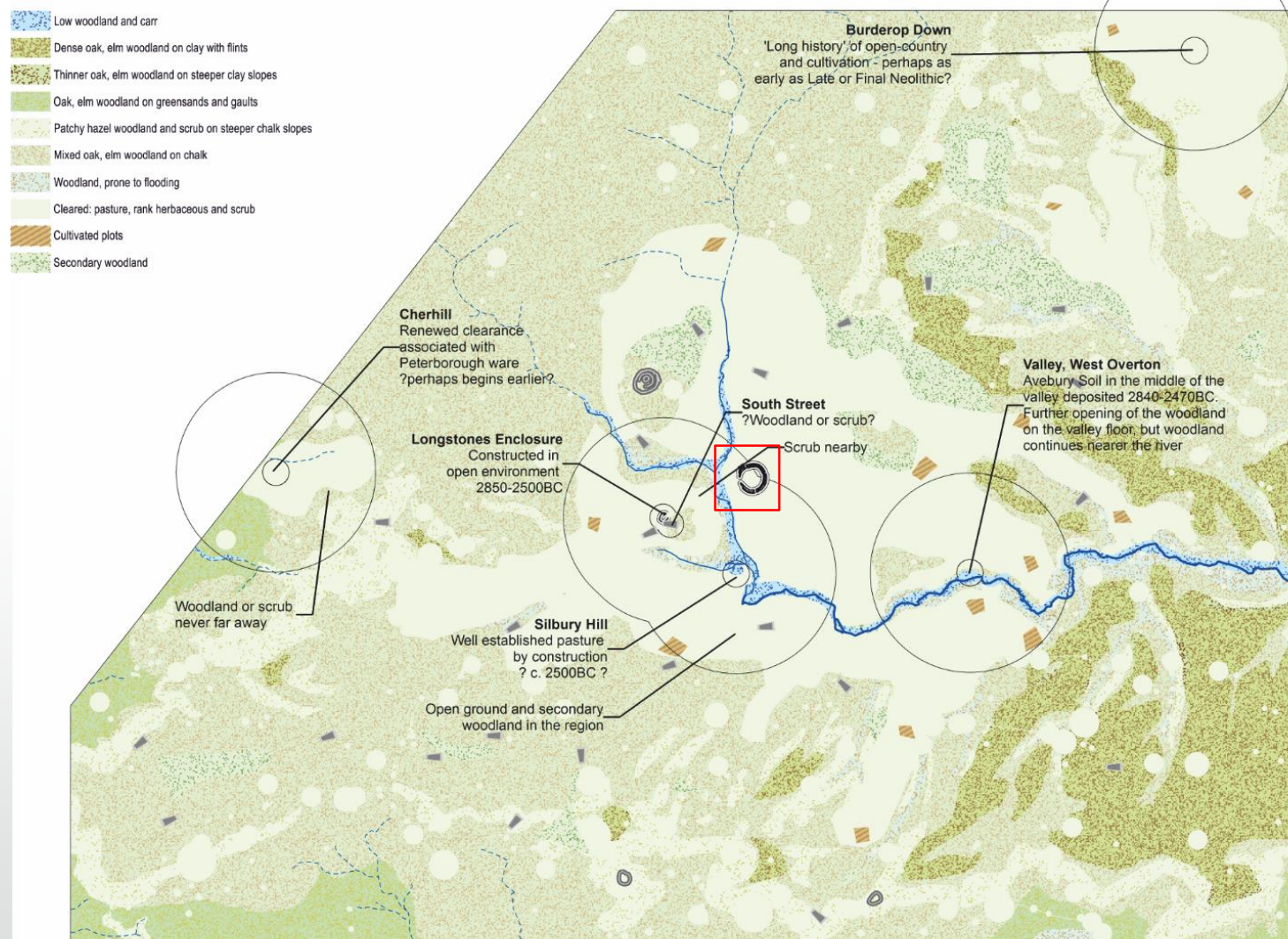


Fig. 52  
Schematic reconstruction of the late neolithic landscape of the Avebury region



# Later Neolithic (c. 3000-2600BC)





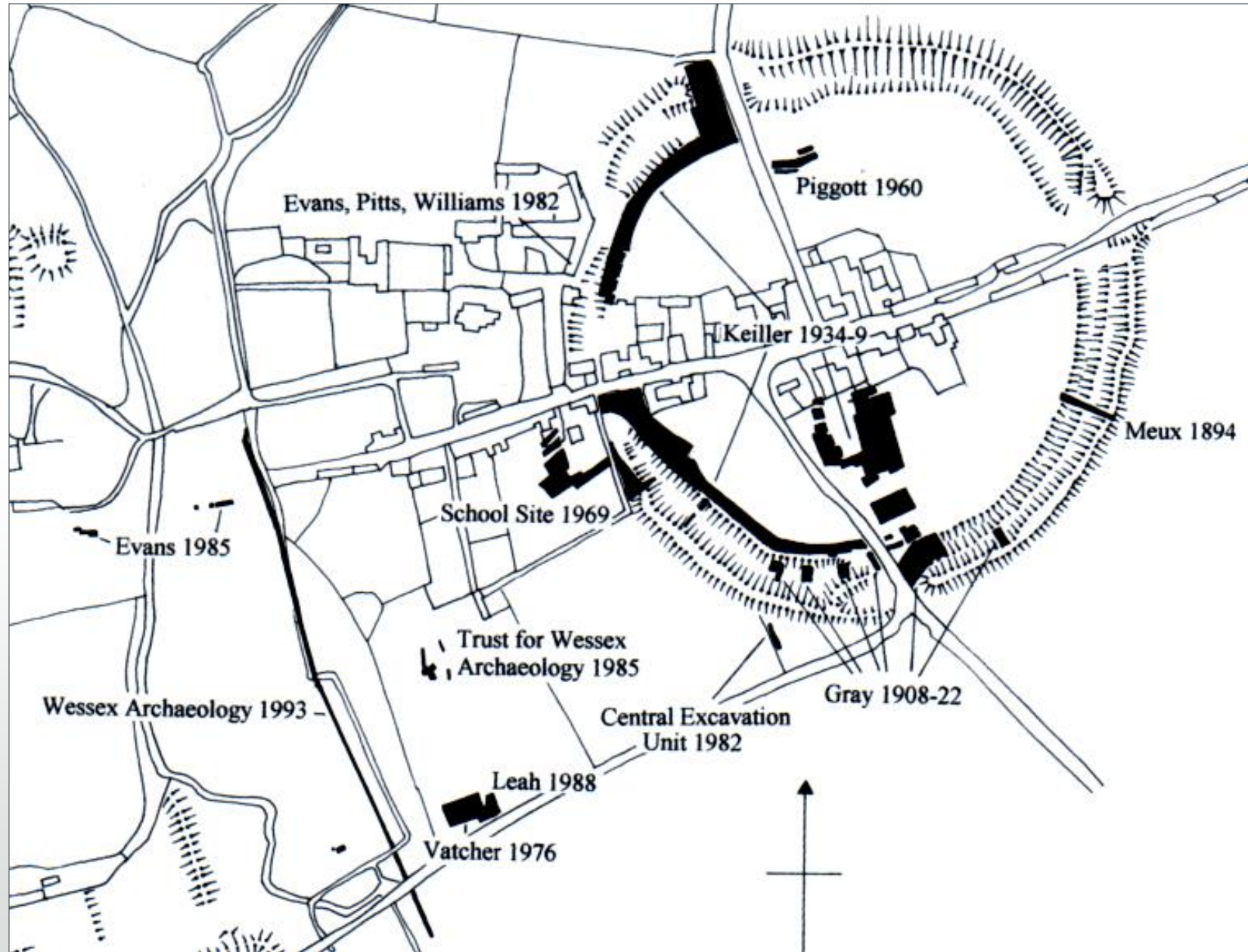
# Earthworks

- Built on a low rise forming a natural platform
- Ditch around 21m wide, up to 12m deep
- External bank enclosing the ditch
- Four entrance causeways

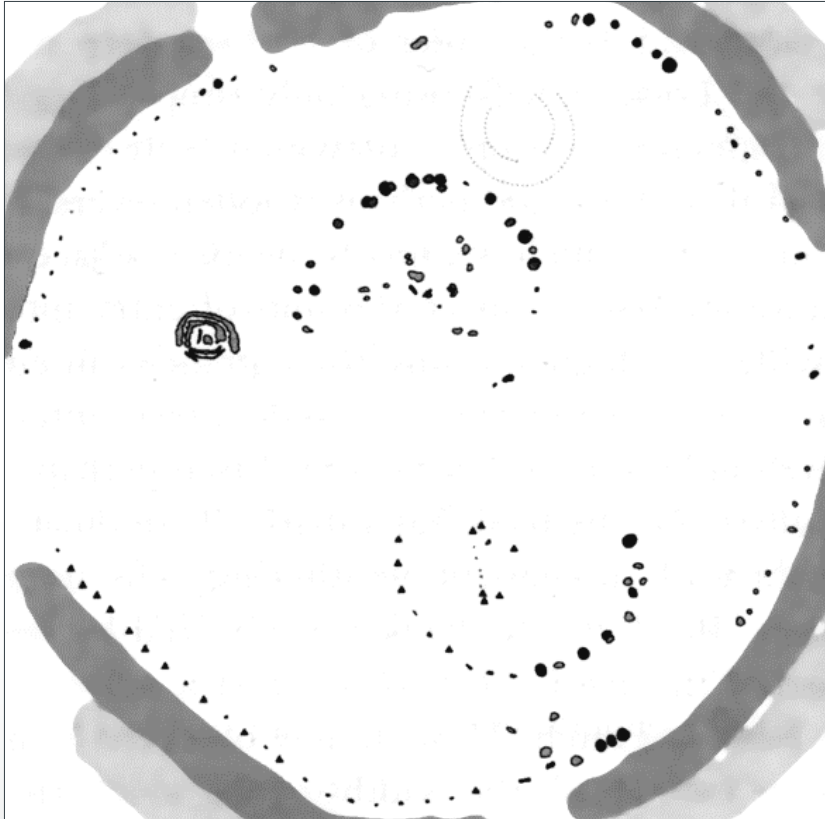




# Excavations

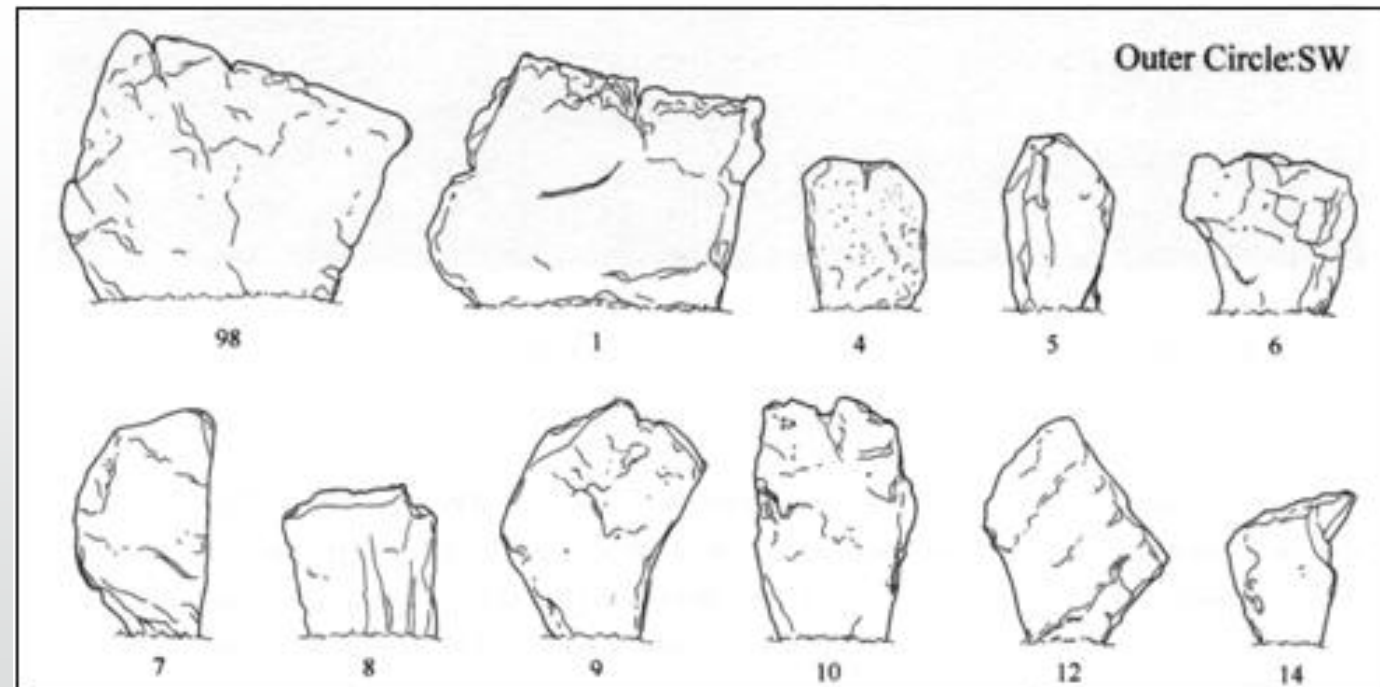






- The stones are generally bigger towards the entrances
- Some have argued that the stones are paired into 'pillars' and 'lozenges'

- *Outer circle* of some 98 stones
- *Northern circle* encloses the Cove and some other stones that don't really fit
- *Southern circle* of around 29 stones, enclosing the Obelisk and 'z-feature'





# Dating the henge

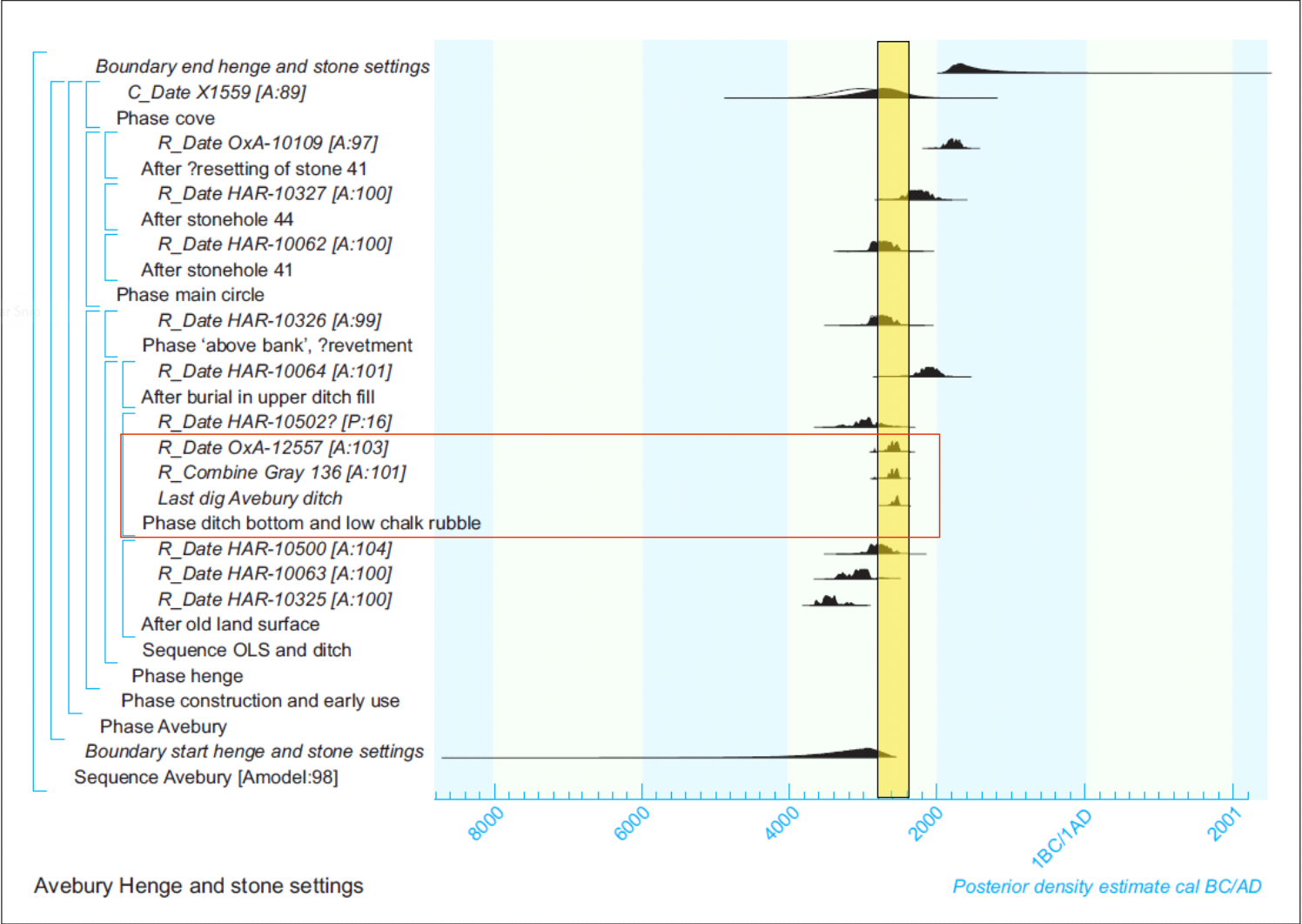
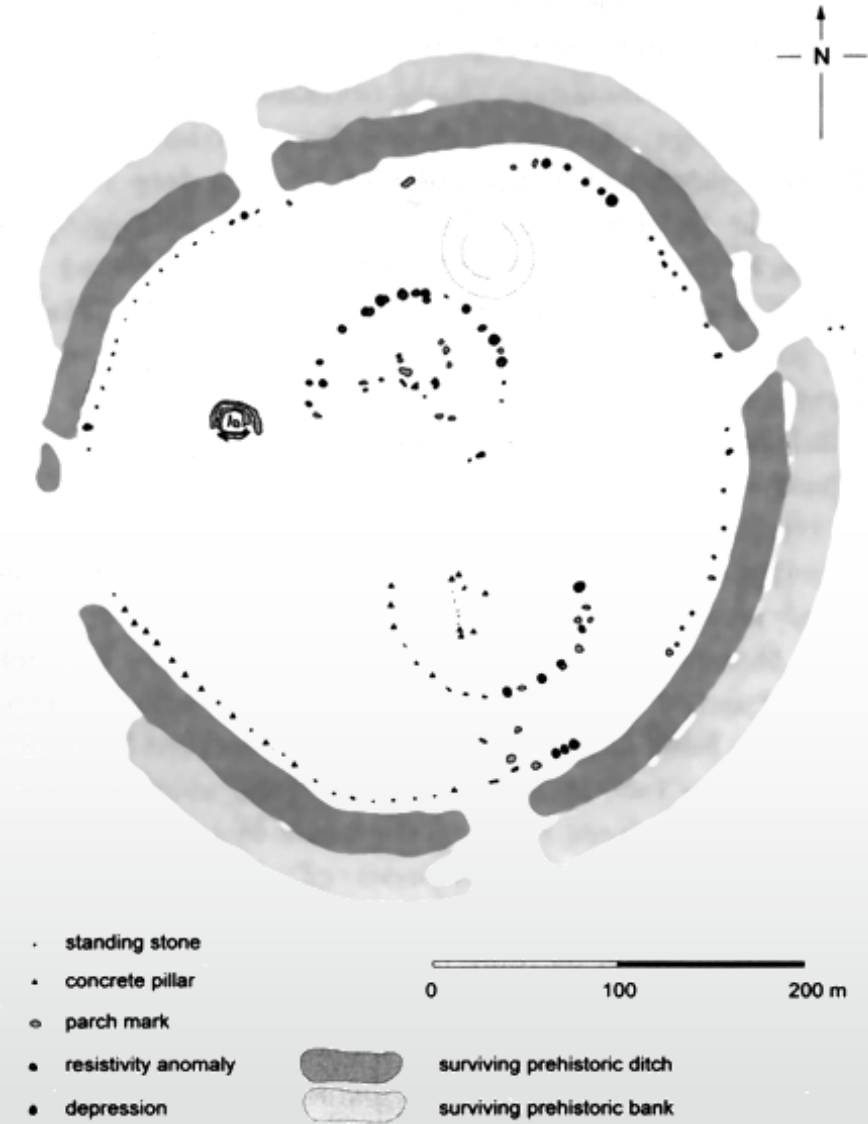


Figure 6 Chronological model for the Avebury henge and stone settings





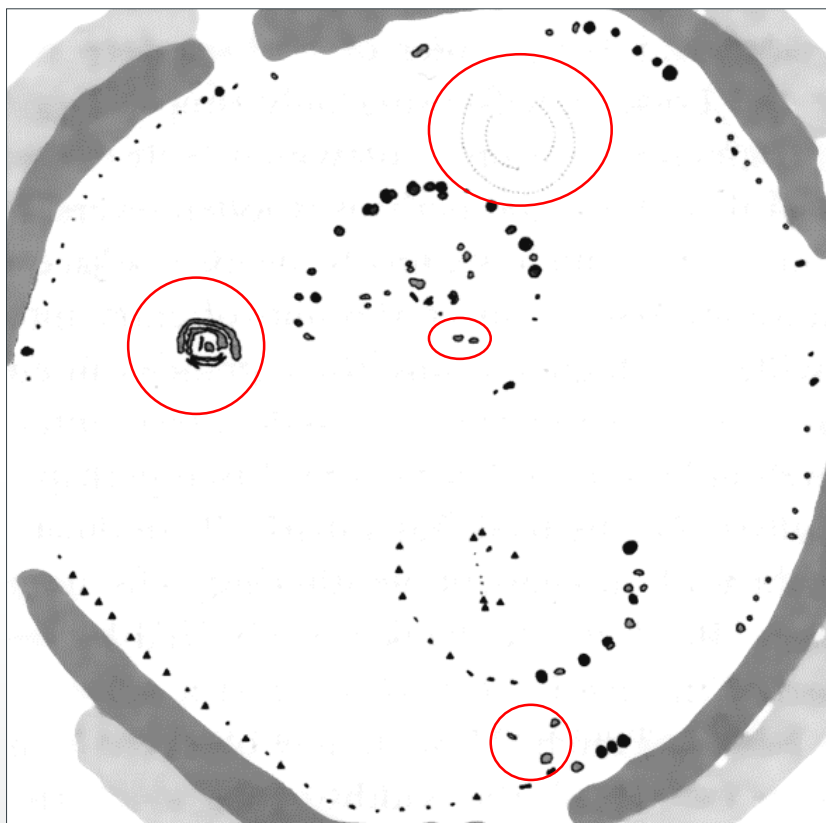
- Main phase of ditch and bank dated by C14 to around 2600BC, although ...
  - First phase bank/enclosure could be as early as 2900/3000BC
  - Which would be about the same date as the first enclosure at Stonehenge



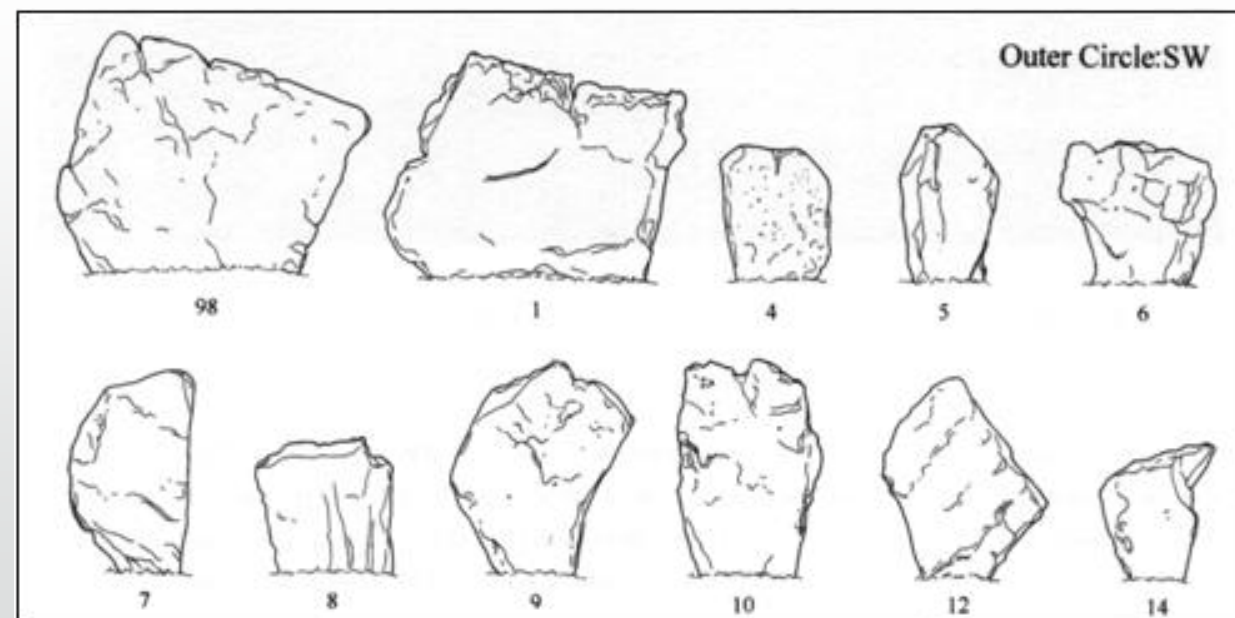
- Stone settings and avenues are not well dated: three determinations span 2900-2200BC
  - Keiller found Grooved Ware (?) in the hole for stone 41
  - Several stones are associated with Beaker burials, but these are probably later insertions



# More complications



- Some stones don't fit into the scheme of outer and two inner circles
- The complexity of the settings may represent changes of plan – 'work in progress'
- Other timber settings and/or earthworks are also known, but have not been excavated





# Avenues

- *West Kennet Avenue* appears to connect to the Sanctuary to the South east
- Timber replaced by stone – perhaps pre-dating the main phase at Avebury

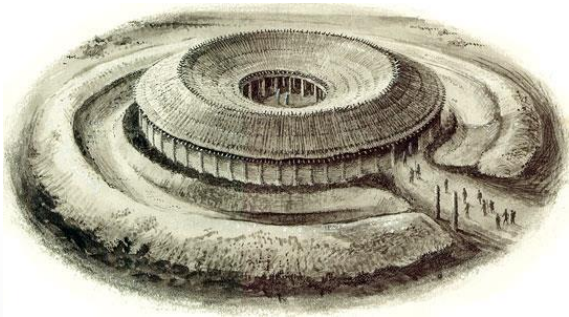
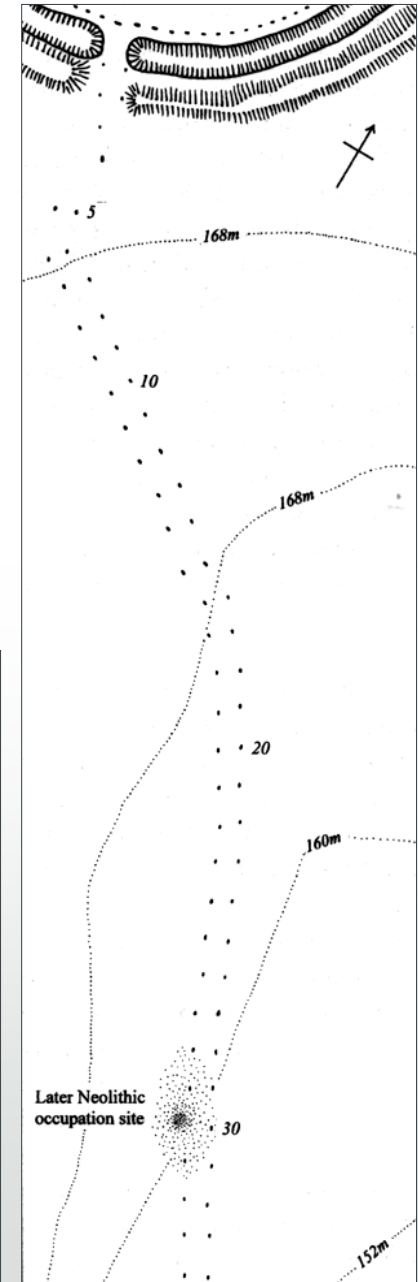
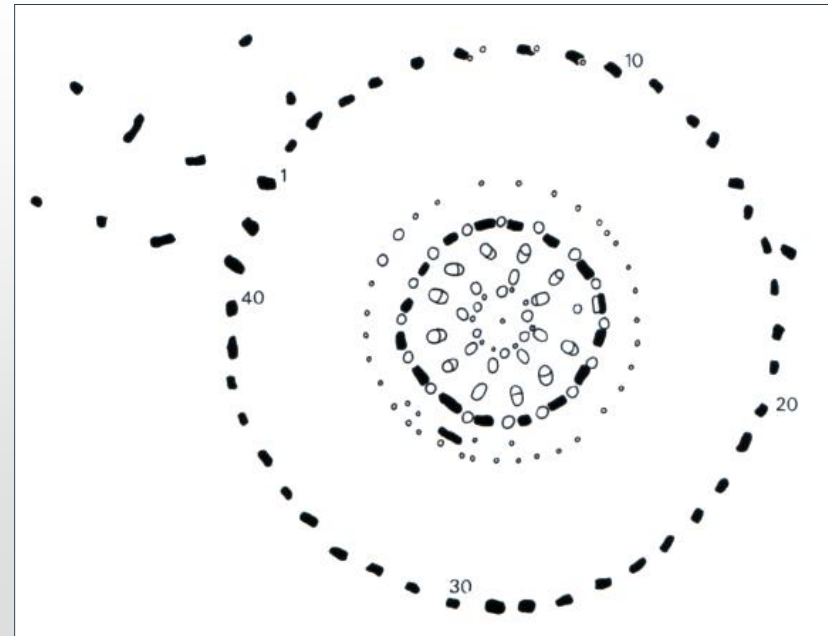
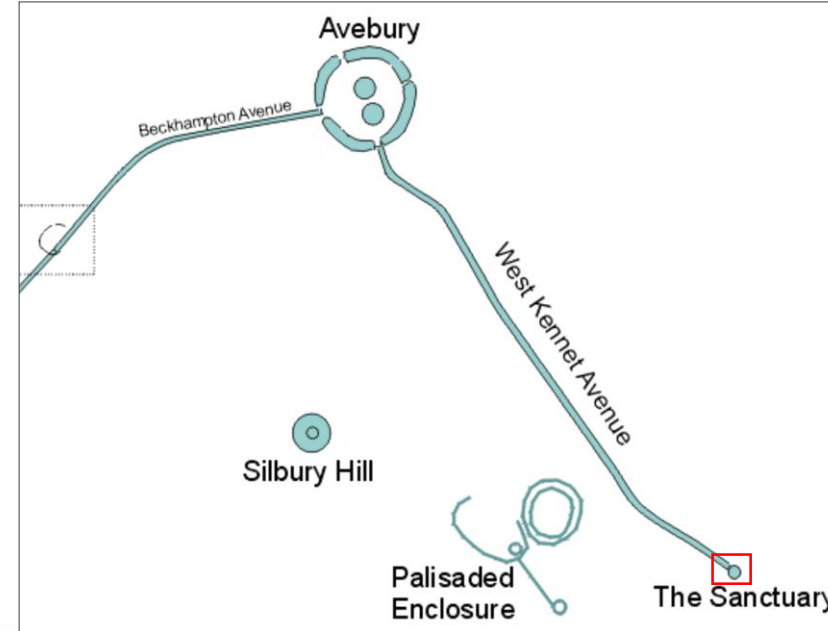


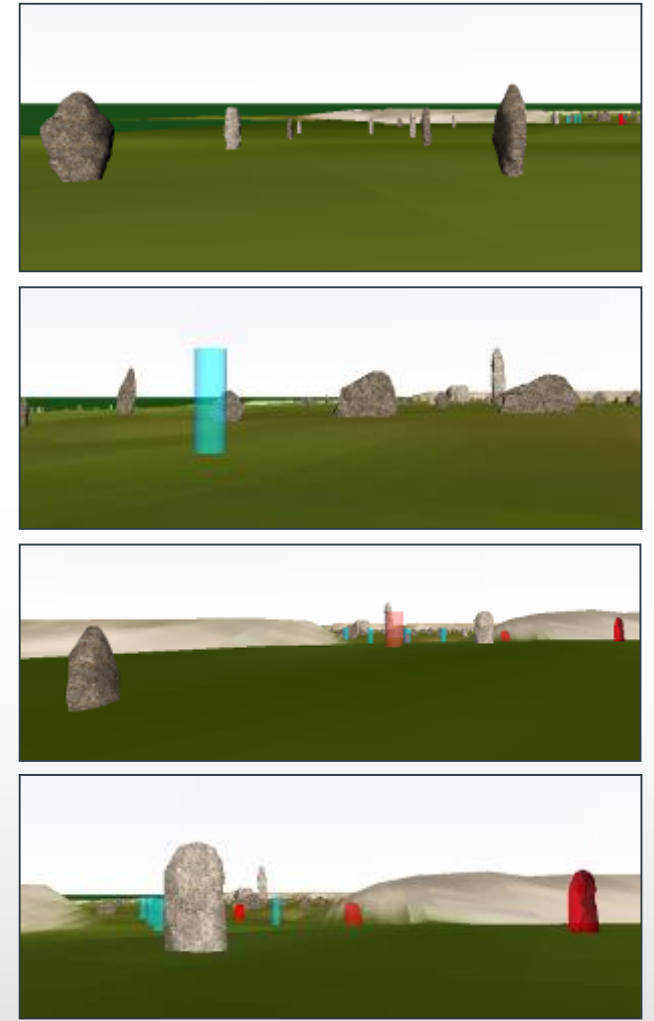
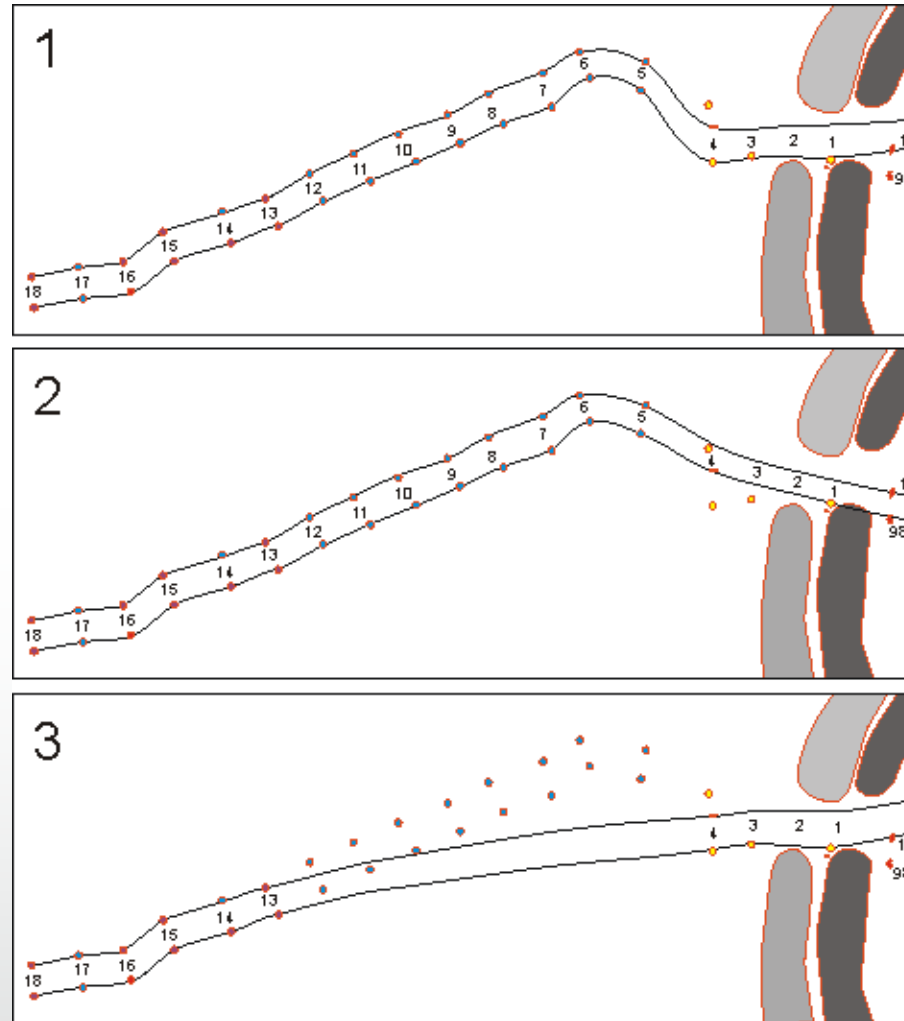
Image © Michael Bott & Rupert Soskin





# The right way in?

- Keiller never resolved how the West Kennet Avenue joined the monument
- Most of the stones had been removed, or moved
- It seems to have a ‘dog leg’ just before joining the southern entrance
- But other interpretations are possible, and a big post hole (1) between bank and ditch are unexplained

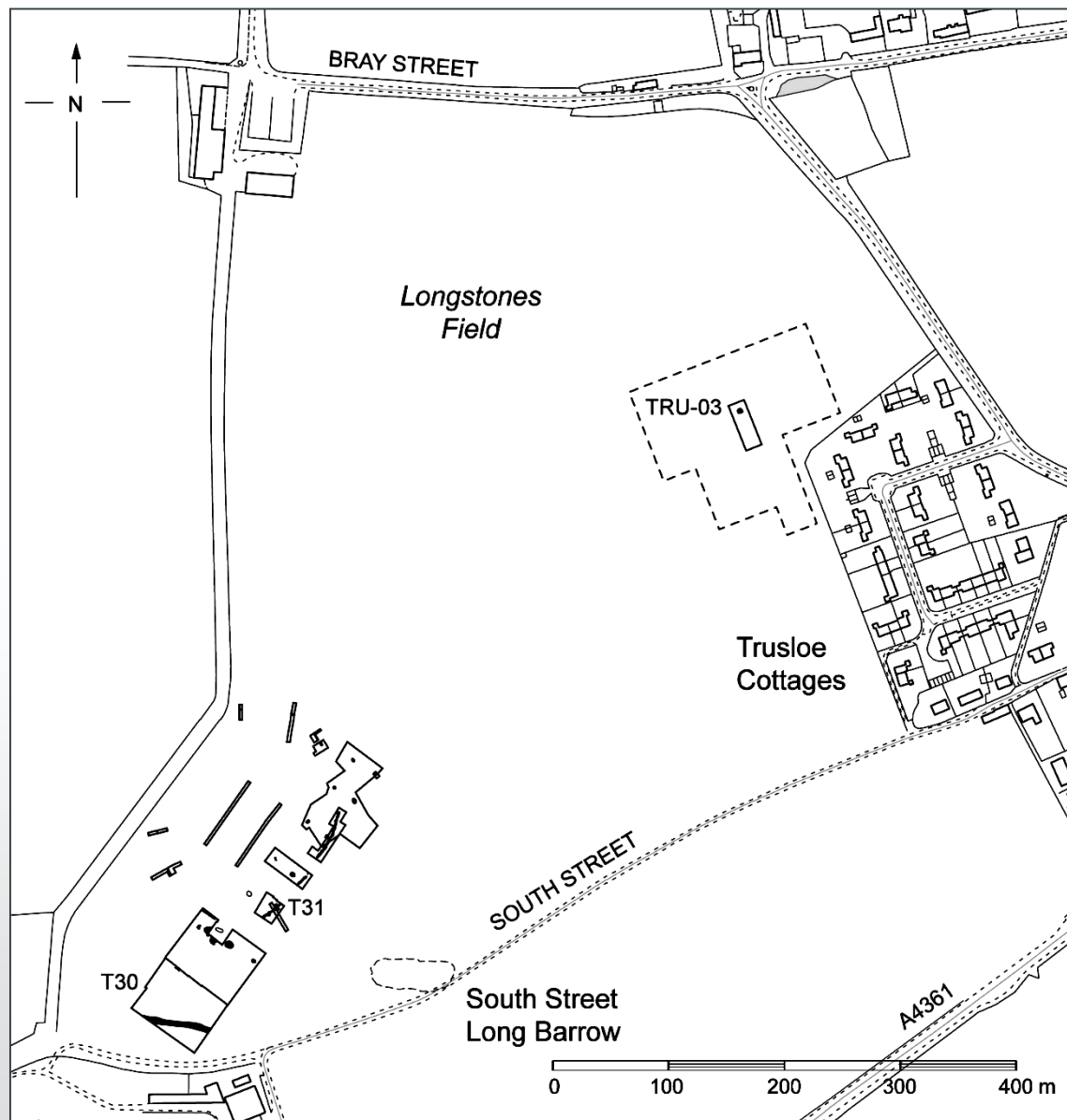


Alternative interpretations of the approach to the southern entrance to Avebury, Wiltshire and ways of representing the uncertainty using transparent and ‘switchable’ elements

(Earl & Wheatley 1996)



# The Beckhampton avenue and Cove and Longstones Enclosure



- Excavations 1999-2004 on course of Beckhampton Avenue
- Shows a sequence of activity, beginning (perhaps) with a small 'causewayed enclosure' around mid third millenium
- Then construction of a 'Cove' type setting





# Beckhampton enclosure

- Small interrupted ditch enclosure, with an internal bank
- Causeways and at least one large 'entrance'
- Clearly visible to and from Windmill Hill to the north
- Deposits in the base followed by short period of natural silting
- Very sterile fills and absence of features inside suggest no activities – even avoidance
- Deliberately levelled

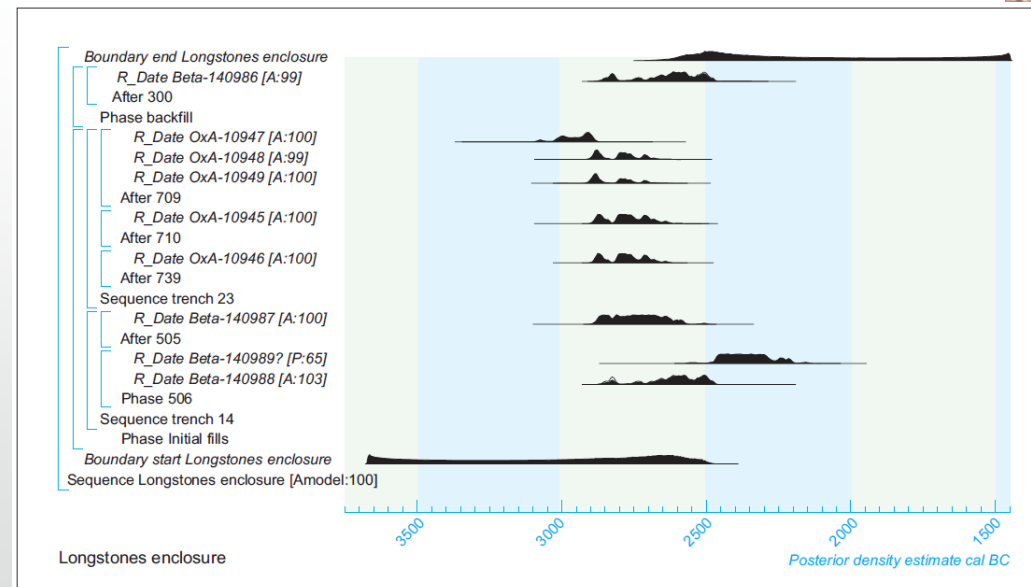
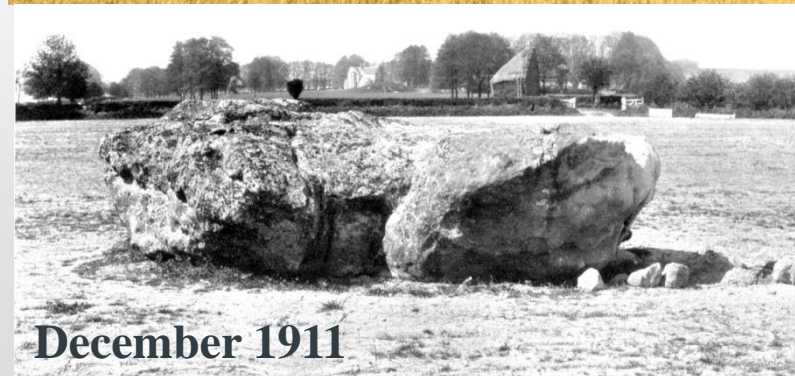
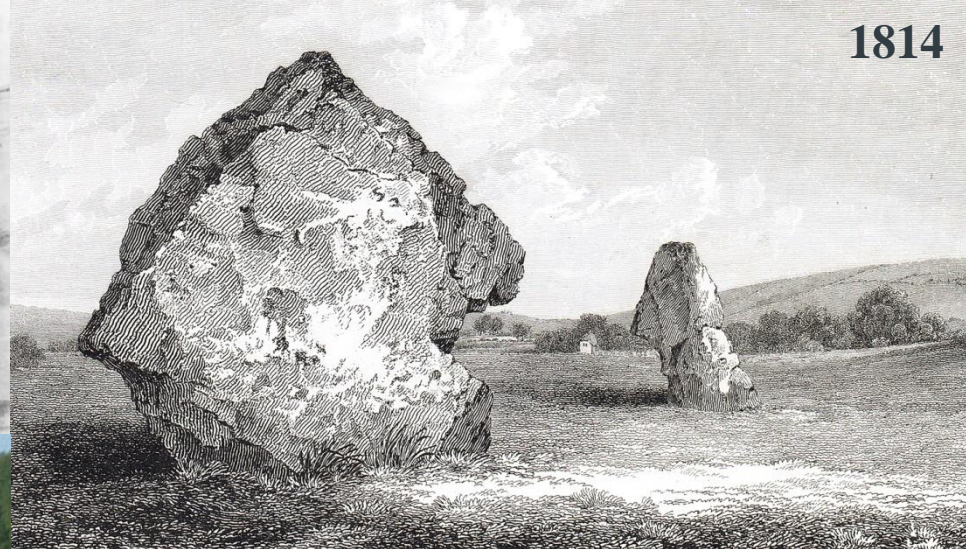


Figure 7 Chronological model for the Longstones enclosure

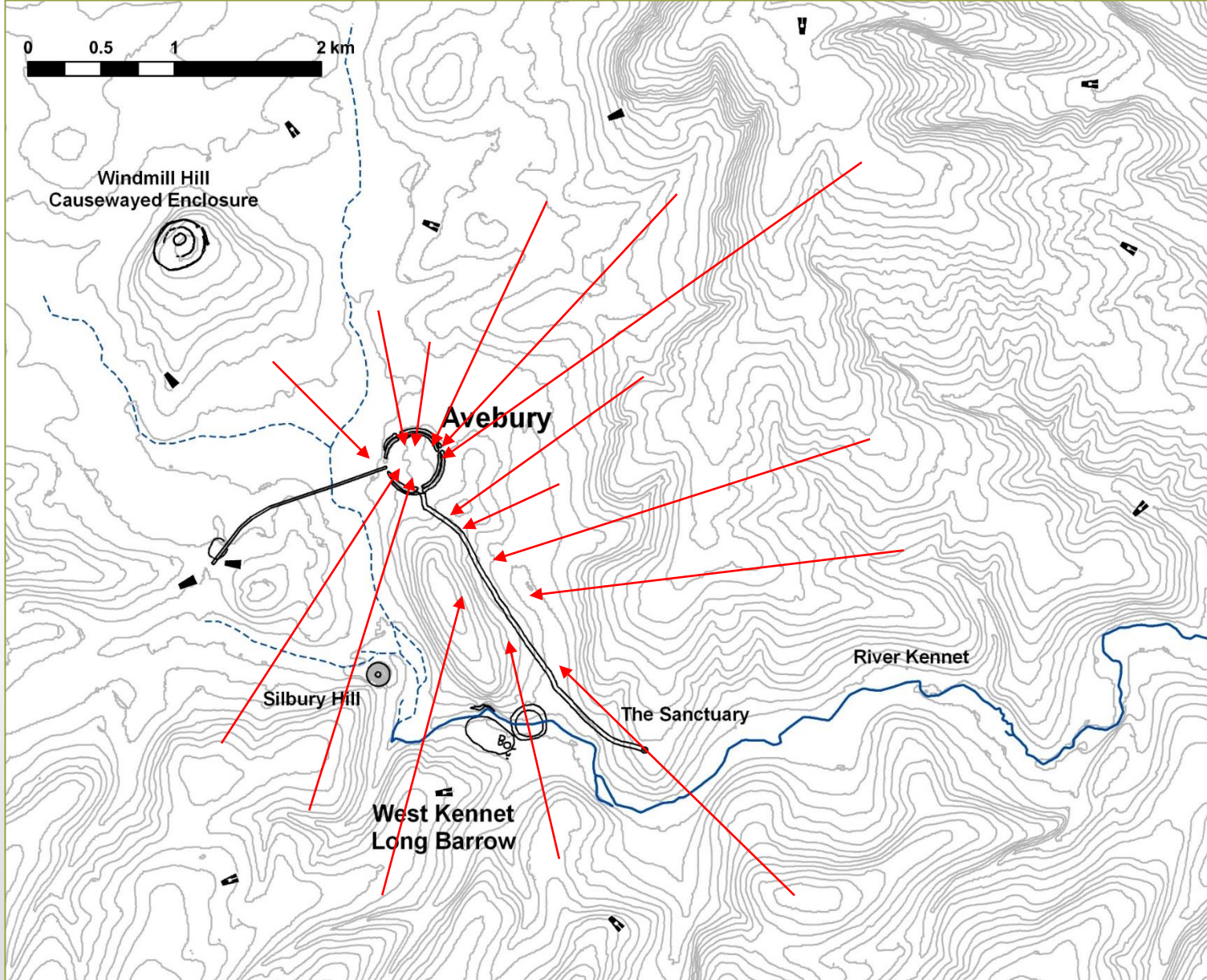


# The right way up?



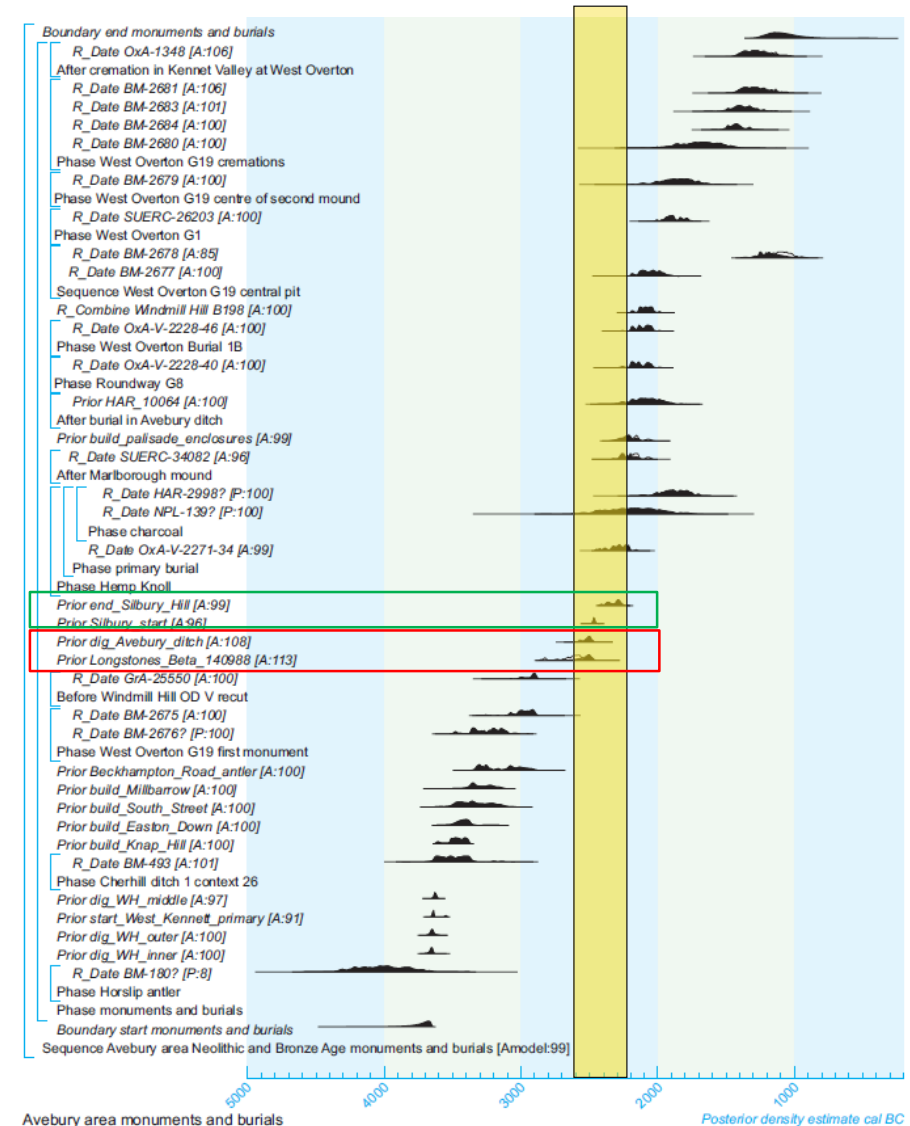
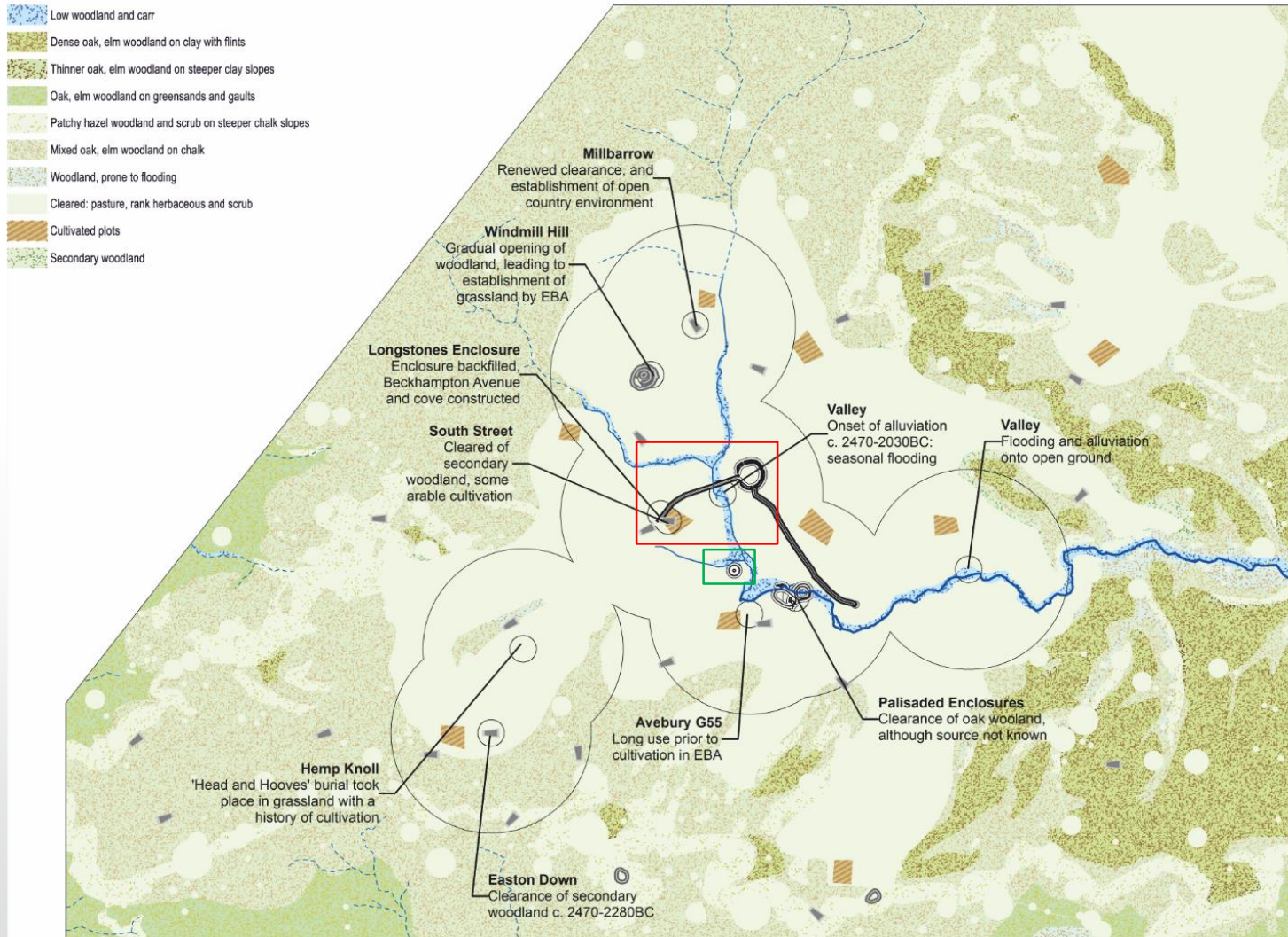


# Collecting the landscape?



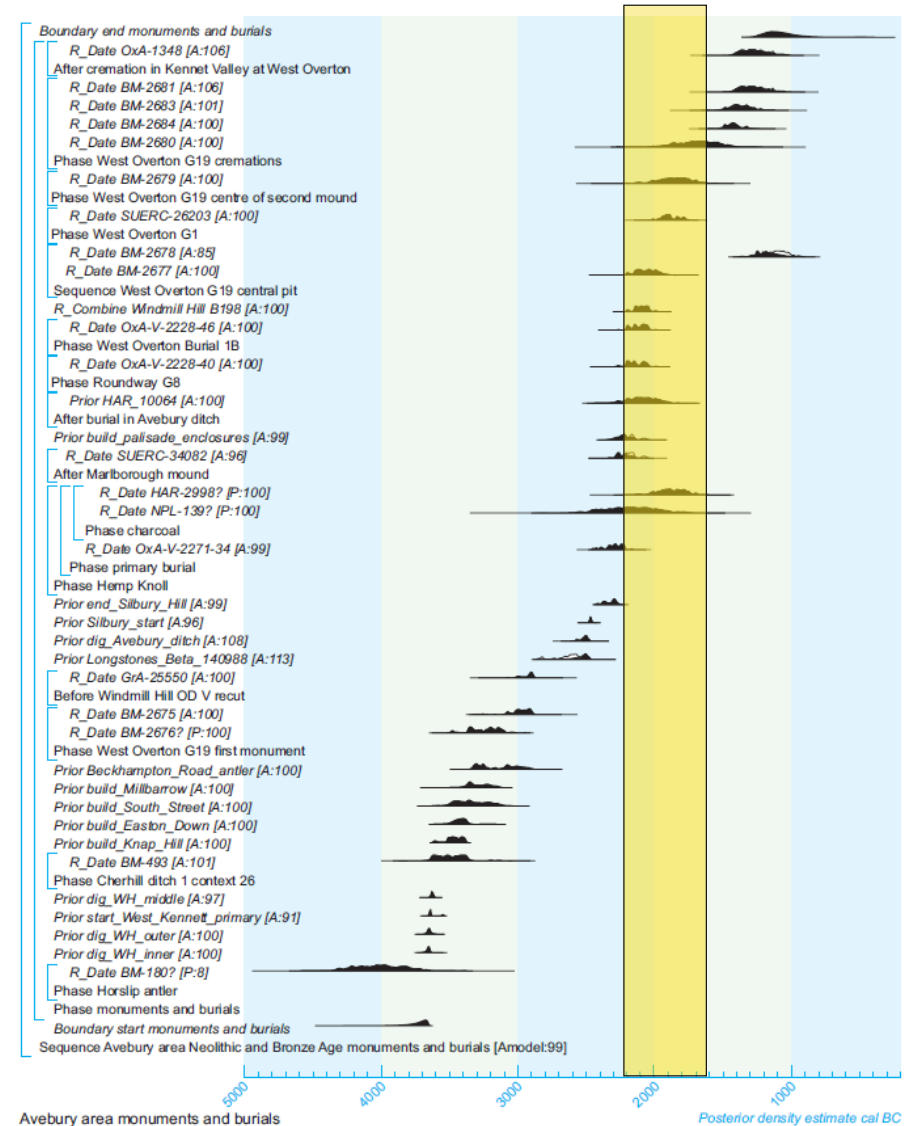
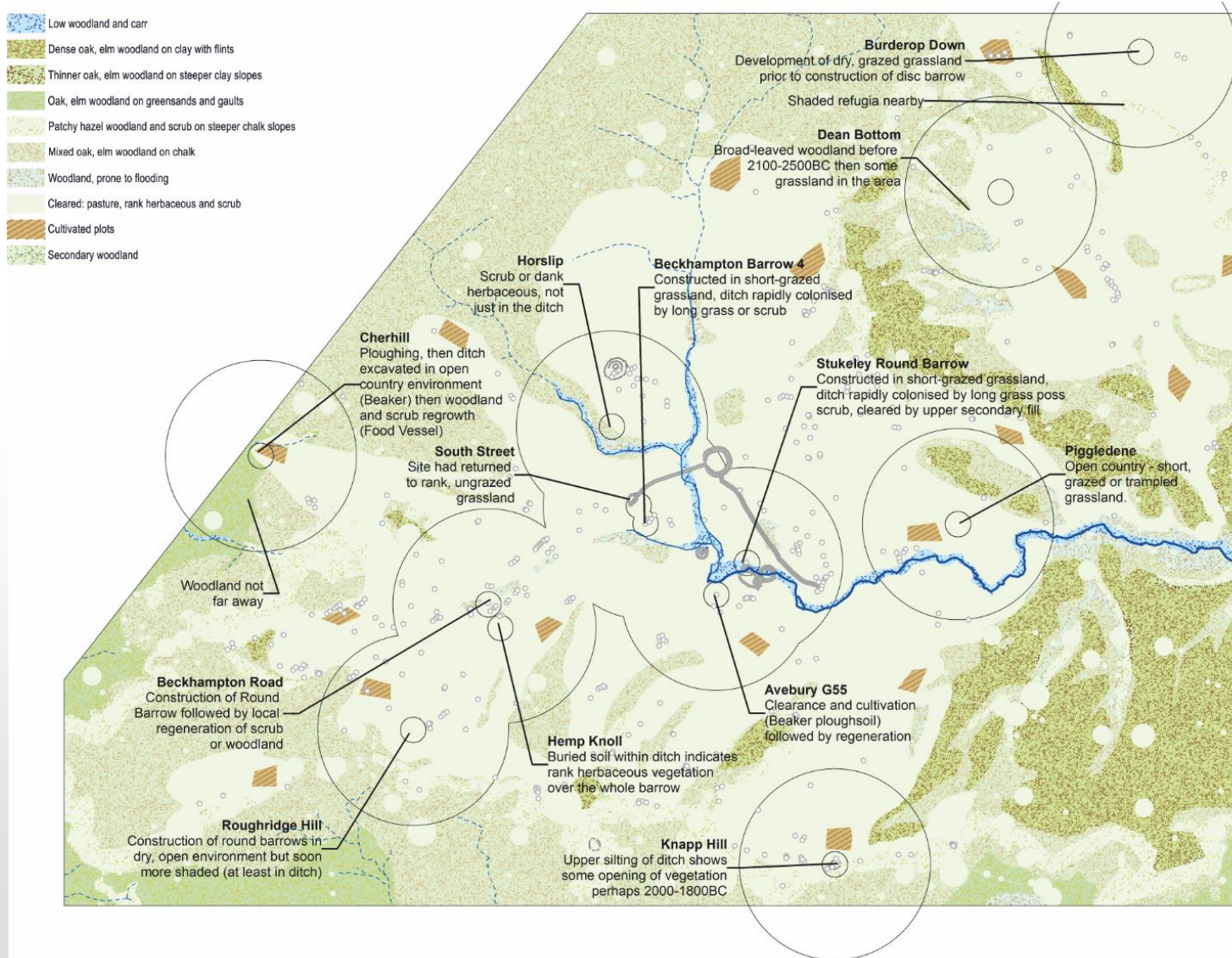


# Final Neolithic (c. 2600-2200BC)



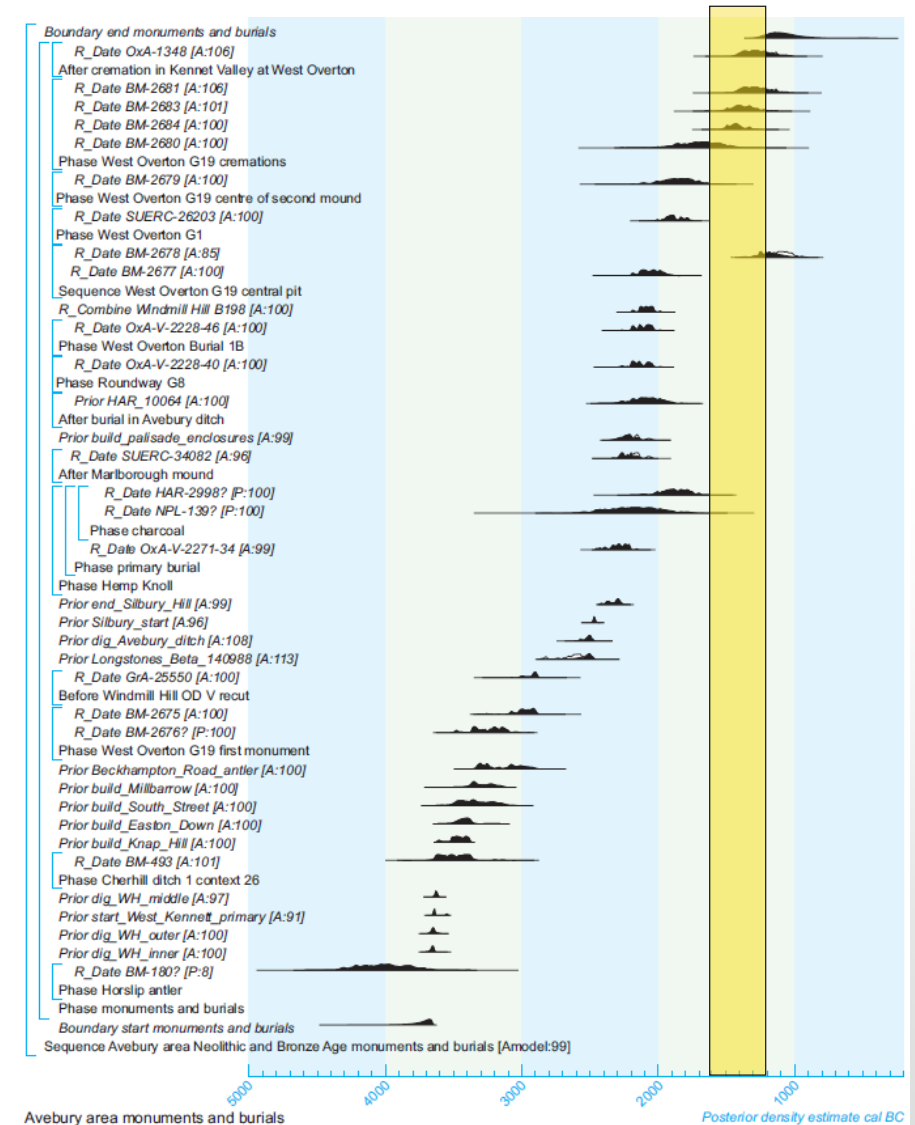
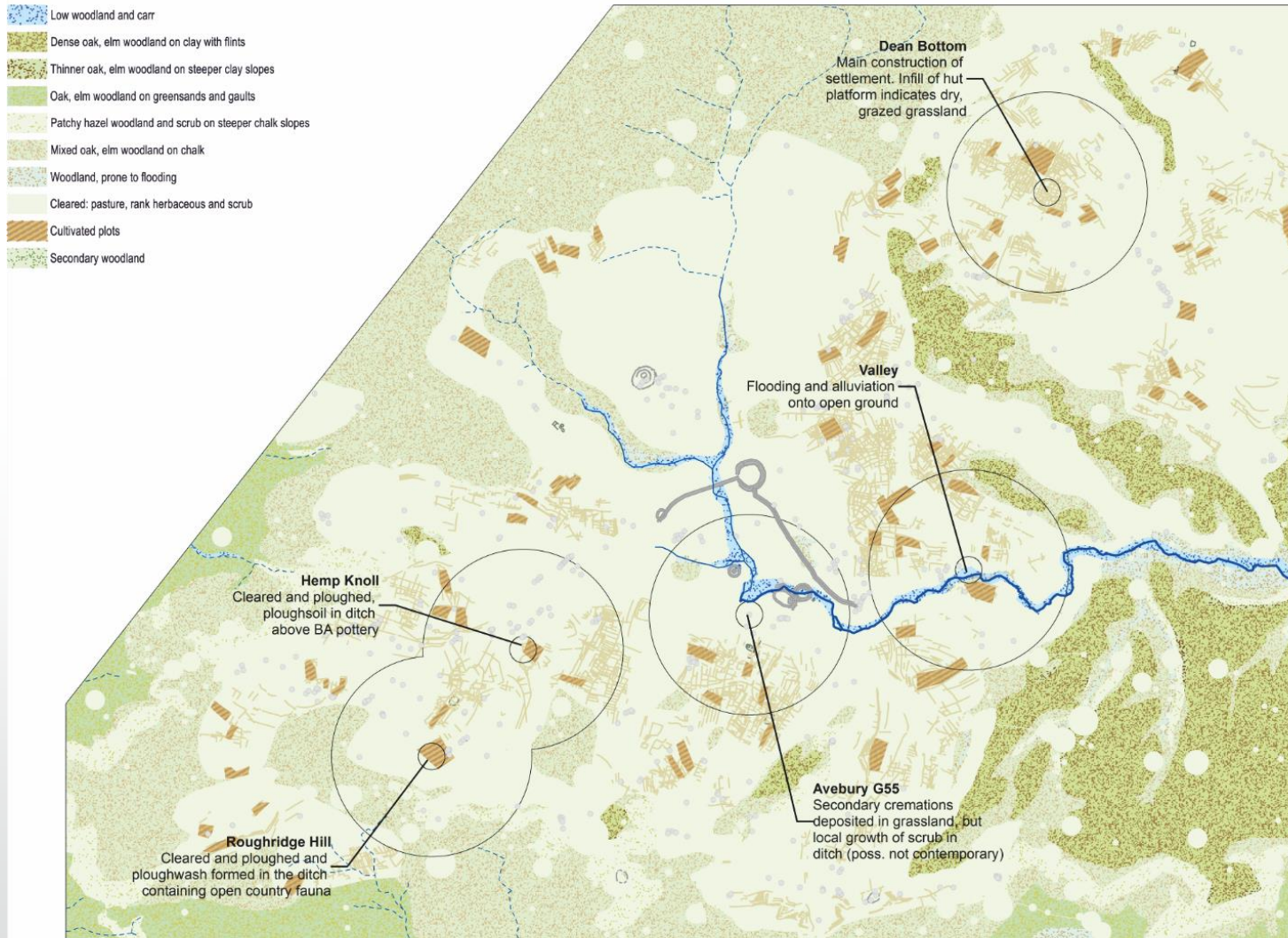


# Early Bronze Age (c. 2200-1600BC)



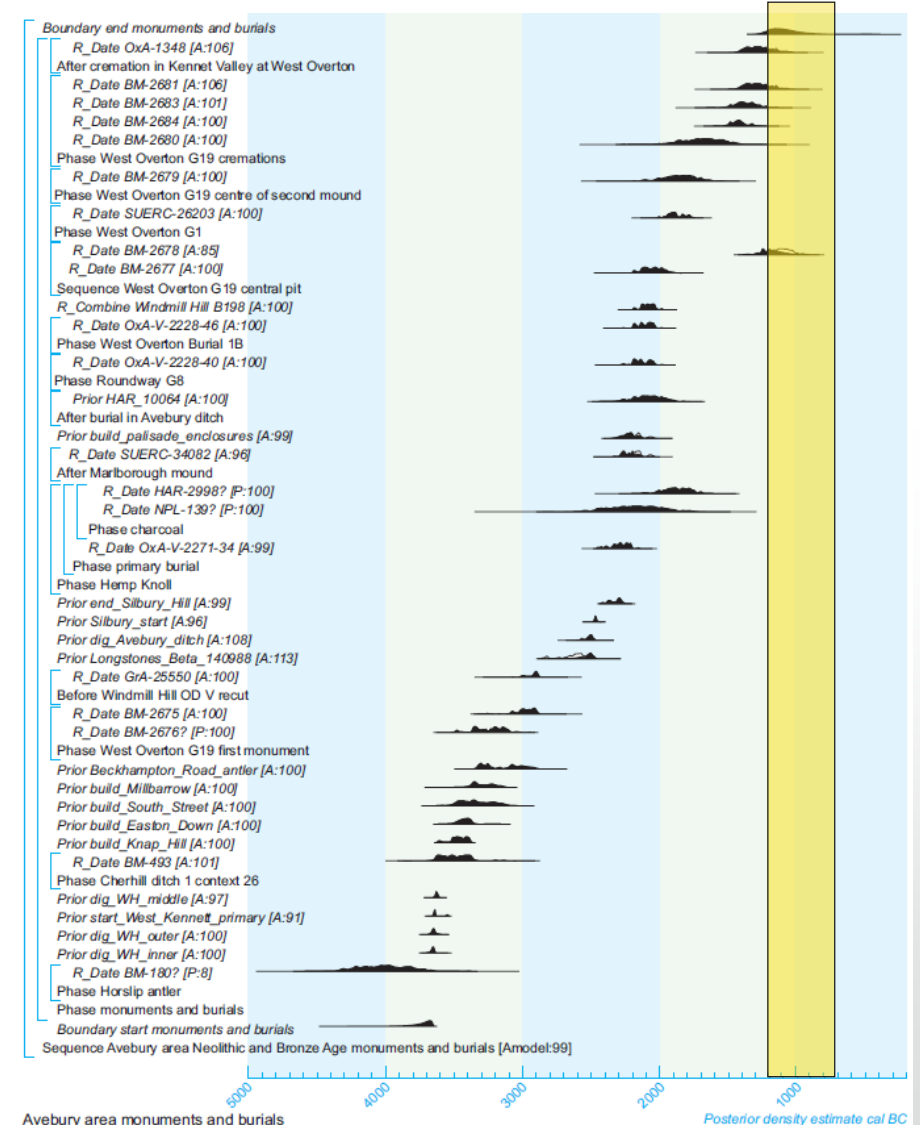
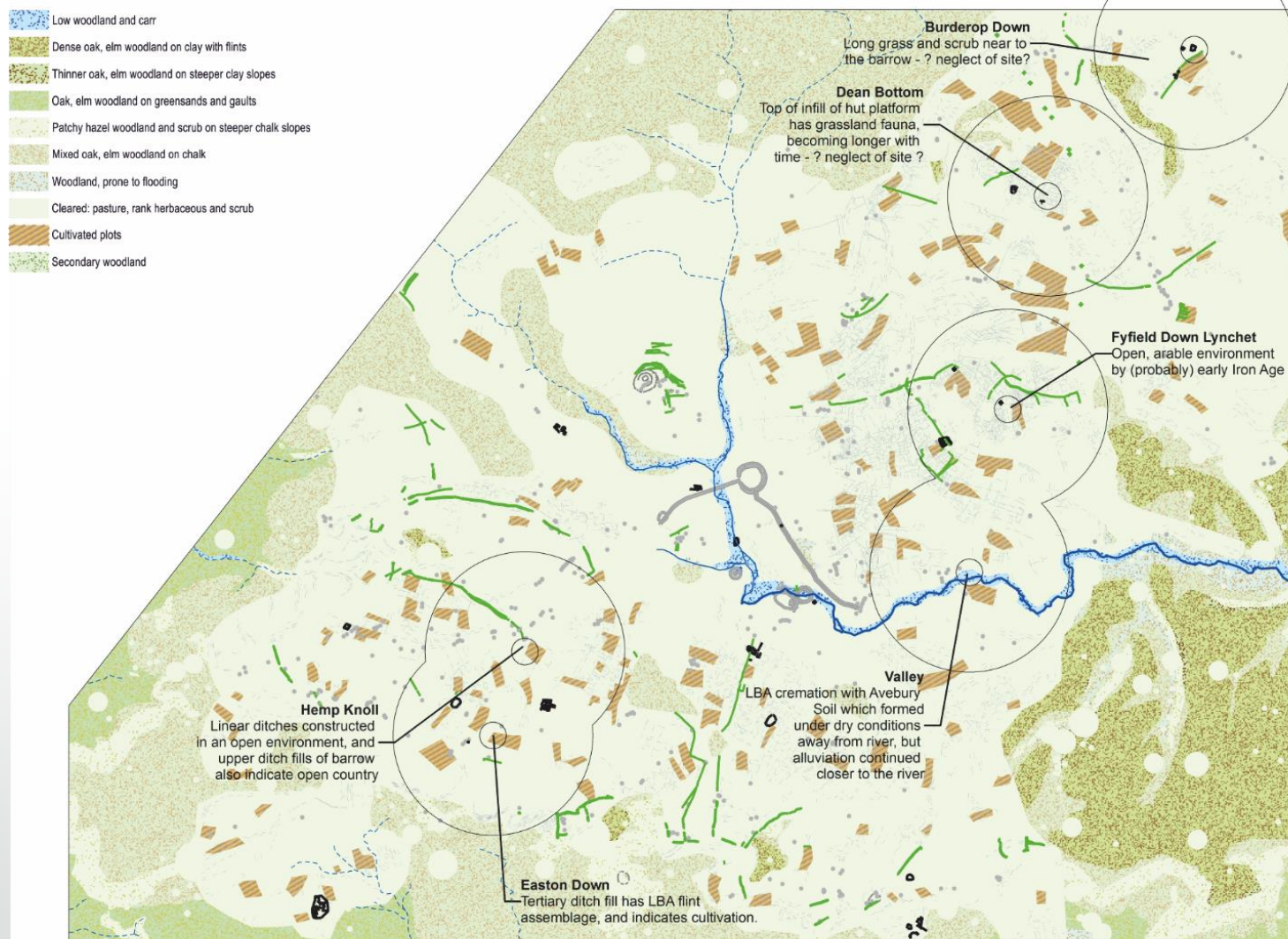


# Middle Bronze Age (c. 1600-1200BC)





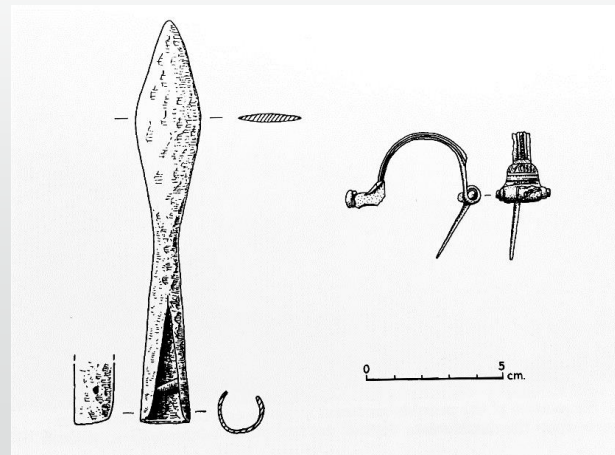
# Later Bronze Age (c. 1200BC onwards)





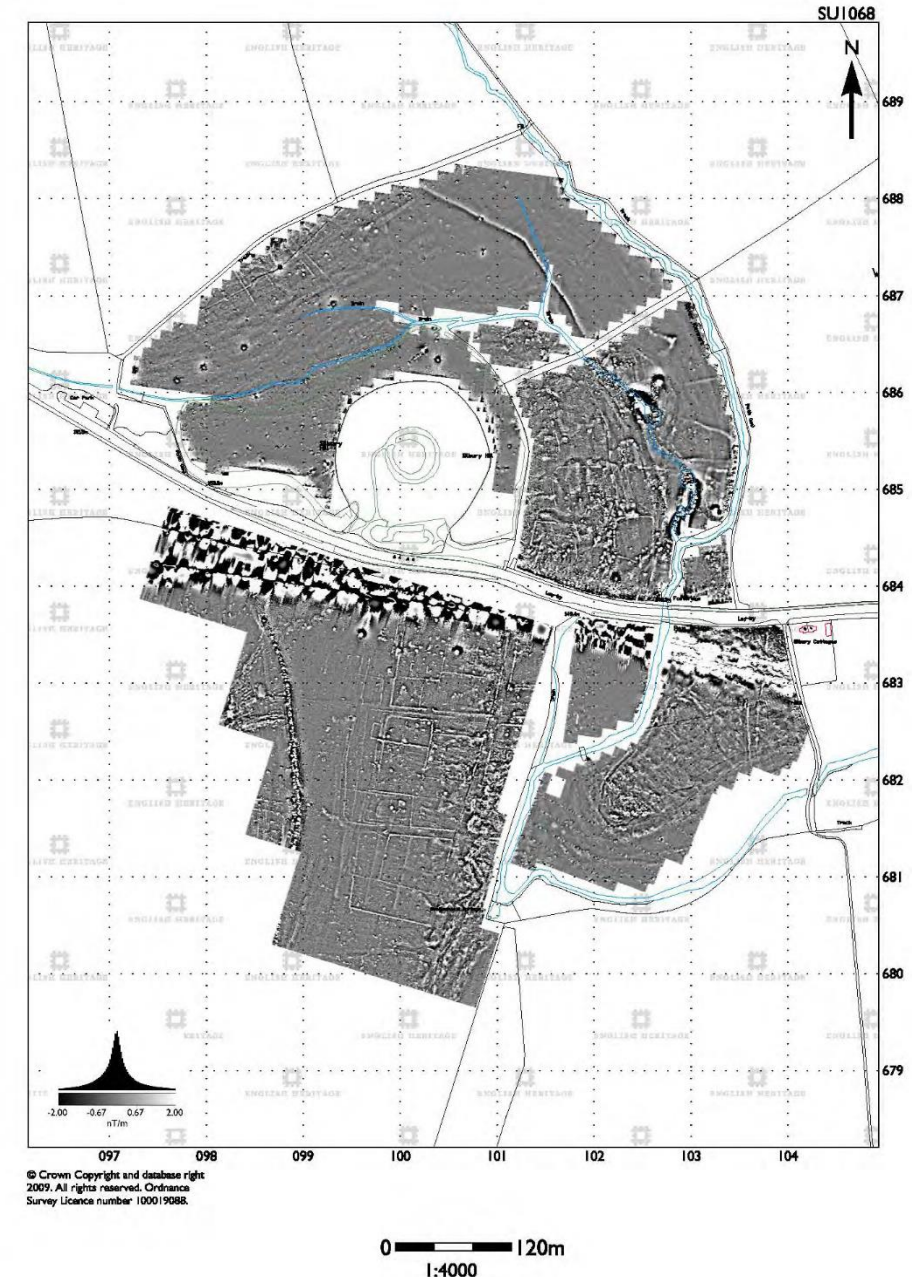
# Iron age and Roman Avebury

- The Roman Road at Silbury stimulated a large roadside settlement or 'cult' centre
- Avebury is 1.5km north, so likely an easy visit
- Stukeley reports finds of Roman coins at Avebury
- Gray recovered Roman material, including a brooch
- Keiller reports low densities of R-B pottery
- Roman spearhead from Longstones Cove
- BUT remarkably little LBA and Iron age material ...



SILBURY HILL, WILTSHIRE  
Location of magnetic surveys, February 2005 - February 2008

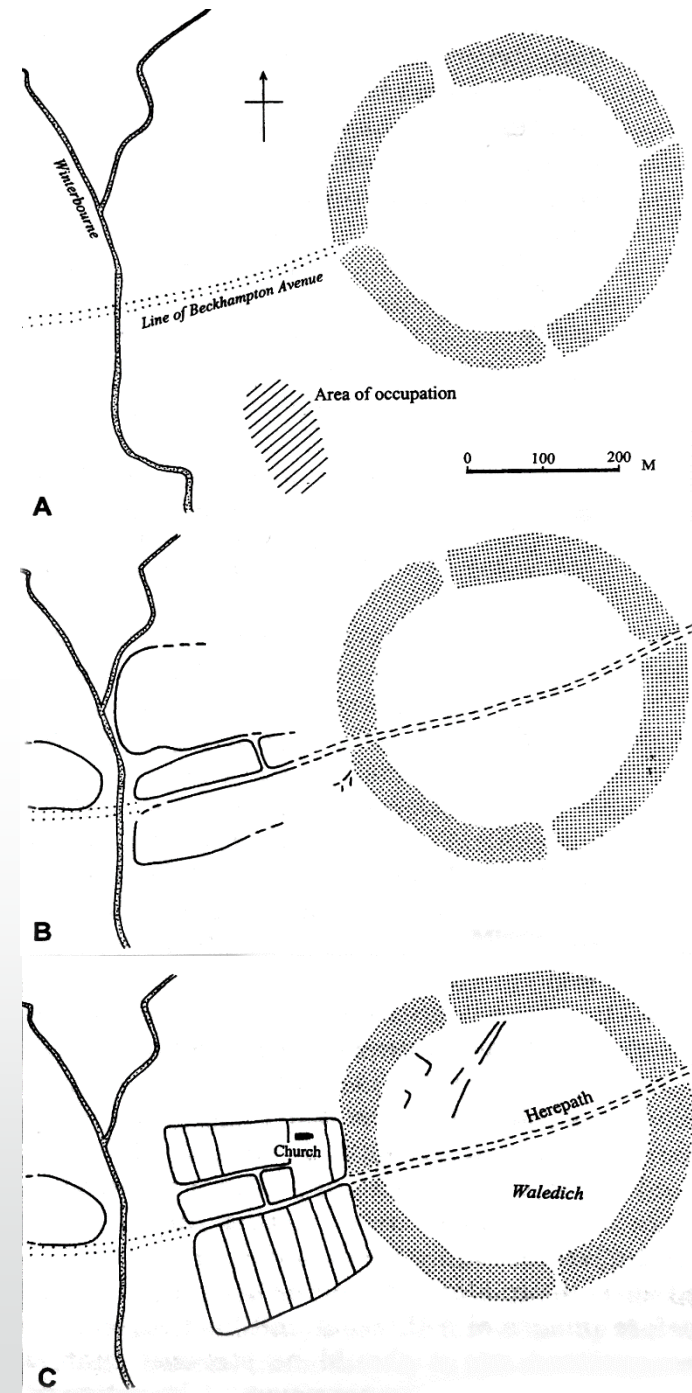
Figure





# Saxon village

- By the Domesday Book, there is a record of Avebury church:  
*Rainbald the priest holds the church of AVREBERIE to which belongs 2 hides. It is worth 40s*
- The Village may have developed much earlier, perhaps out of the Roman Silbury settlement from around 500AD on
- 650-1000AD saw the emergence Wessex, Christianity and the emergence of some regional towns, and the village builds a church next to the henge bank
- By the late Anglo Saxon period, the village (Avreberie) and adjacent henge (waledich) are recognised
- Settlement inside the henge is not documented, but a Herepath does run through the henge





# Later prehistoric aversion?

- Is there a pattern of later prehistoric avoidance, before Saxon re-use?
- Old Radcliffe Infirmary, Oxford (MOLA):



The remains of four vast circular ditches were excavated in the grounds of the old Radcliffe Infirmary. They ranged in size from 20m to 58m in diameter and one of them consisted of two concentric ditches of roughly 40m and 20m diameter respectively. The shape and location of these monuments are thought to have great ritual significance to prehistoric people and are frequently associated with burials.

To the east of the site, further circular features have been observed in the University Parks using air photography. These appear to align directly with our Infirmary ring ditches which, together with other monuments, including a large henge found under part of St John's College (top right), expand this part of north Oxford into a spectacular ritual landscape. A place of worship, wonder, reverence and ancient mysteries; just below your feet in the depths of the past ...

Found within the largest of the Infirmary ring ditches (58m across) was an even more ancient monument: part of a Neolithic square enclosure ditch.

NOW: In a landscape dominated by the buildings of a modern city, cast your mind back ...

THEN: Here, was a great space, revered since time immemorial

Set across a finger of land, between two glittering rivers: huge man-made circles

From the vast depths of time, the memories of what they were and meant to our ancestors  
Call quietly to the present.

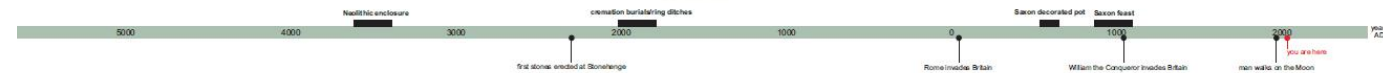
This artistic recreation represents a possible scene in Bronze Age north Oxford nearly 4000 years ago and is based on some of the archaeological evidence found over the last few years. Here we show a funeral in progress (bottom, left): a family lays to rest the cremated remains of one of its own, while the smoke from another pyre curls into the air behind them (centre right). Beyond them (top, right), a ritual is being performed inside a large henge monument, incantations and offerings are being made to ancient and now long forgotten gods ...



ring structure survived still visible in even observed, and this of one at the redness of this he new practice wer of the old.



Only two burials, both cremations, were found and radiocarbon dated to 2030-1870 BCE; others from the site were probably destroyed by historic and modern landscaping and building. The remains shown left appear to have been interred in a bag or other organic container that has completely rotted away, leaving nothing more than a few handfuls of ash and burnt bone.



## ANGLO-SAXONS...

After the Bronze Age, there is little evidence for any activity on the site for a long period of time beyond a background Iron Age and Roman presence in the form of a few scattered sherds of abraded pottery mixed into a soil layer.

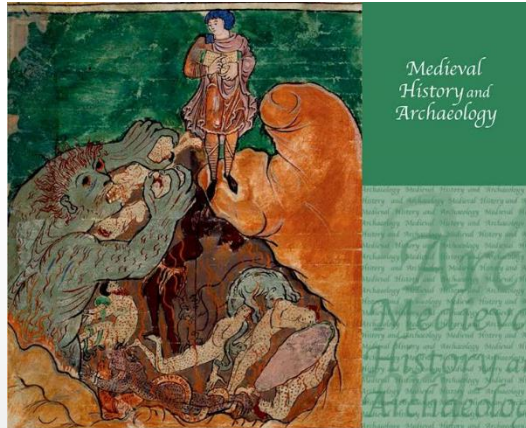
It is not until after the withdrawal of Roman control over Britain (c AD 410) in the Anglo-Saxon period that we have solid proof of people directly using and living on the site.

During the building of the original infirmary (1760-70), two Anglo-Saxon burials (one containing a possible shield boss) were uncovered by workmen. No more burials were found in the recent excavations, but other evidence of Anglo-Saxon life was found.



# Saxon appropriation?

- Saxon communities seem to have made very active use of earlier sites and monuments for e.g. burials
- “Ritual appropriation”?



## PERCEPTIONS OF THE PREHISTORIC IN ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND

Religion, Ritual, and Rulership  
in the Landscape

Sarah Semple



	Round Barrows	Long Barrows	Hillforts	Henges, etc.	Linear earthworks	Roman Structures	TOTAL
Wessex	44	17	7	2	1	4	75
Upper Thames	27	4	10	2	1	11	55
South East	32	0	2	0	1	7	42
East Anglia	31	0	0	2	0	15	48
Midlands	17	2	3	3	0	14	39
Peak District	19	2	0	1	0	1	23
Yorkshire & Northumbria	32	2	0	5	4	9	52
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>202</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>334</b>



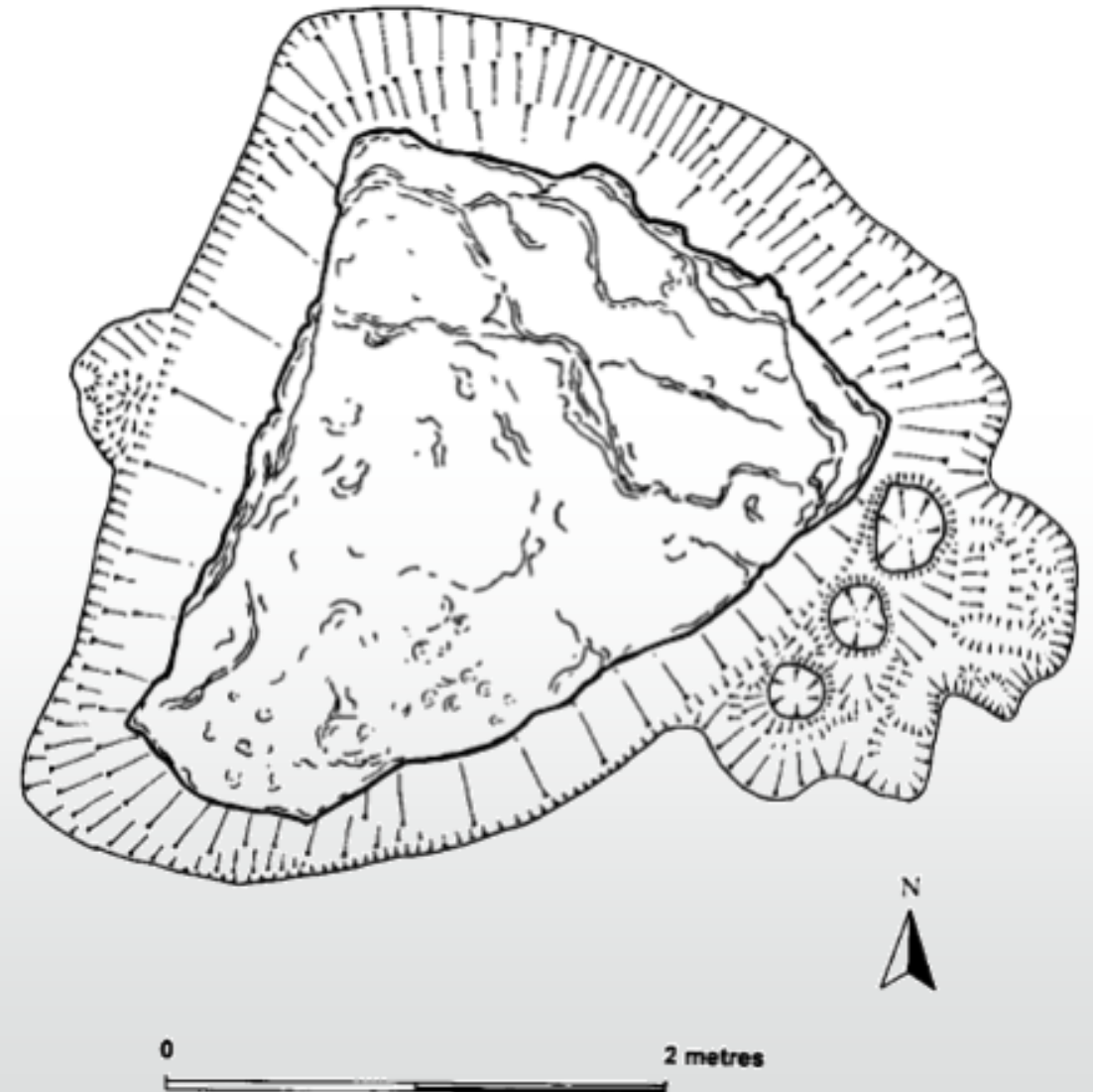
## Ancient Landscapes and the Dead: The Reuse of Prehistoric and Roman Monuments as Early Anglo-Saxon Burial Sites

By HOWARD WILLIAMS





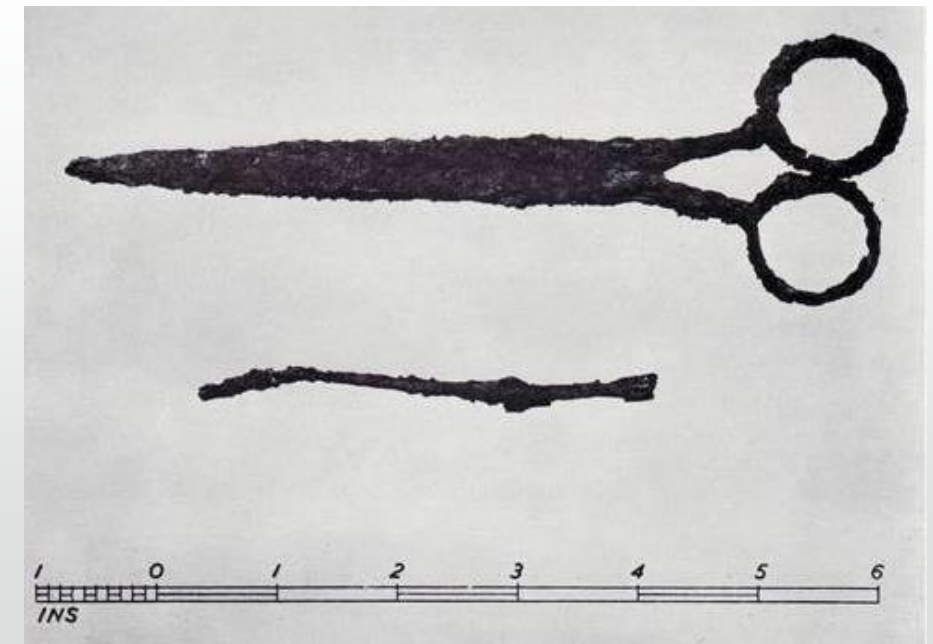
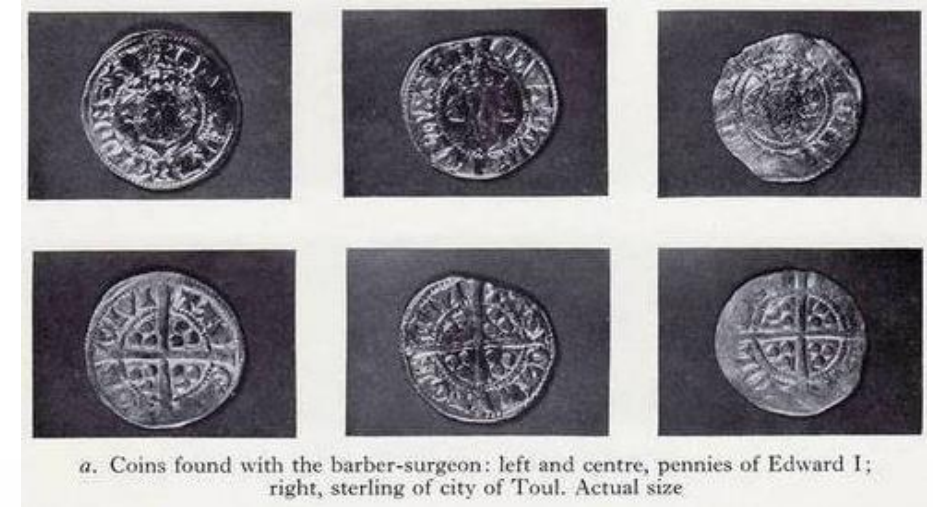
## Early medieval - stone burials





# The 14<sup>th</sup> century “Barber Surgeon”

- Excavated 1938
- Found beneath stone 9 in the SW quadrant
- Accompanied by scissors, a “probe” and early 14<sup>th</sup> C coins
- Skeleton had been thought destroyed in WWII but was rediscovered in 1998
- Likely already dead when buried





# Christianity and prehistory ...

- Knowlton – Cranborne Chase
- Saxon burials close to the Great Barrow
- 12<sup>th</sup> Century church



← The complex has five monuments including at least three henges

Carved stone from the southern circle →



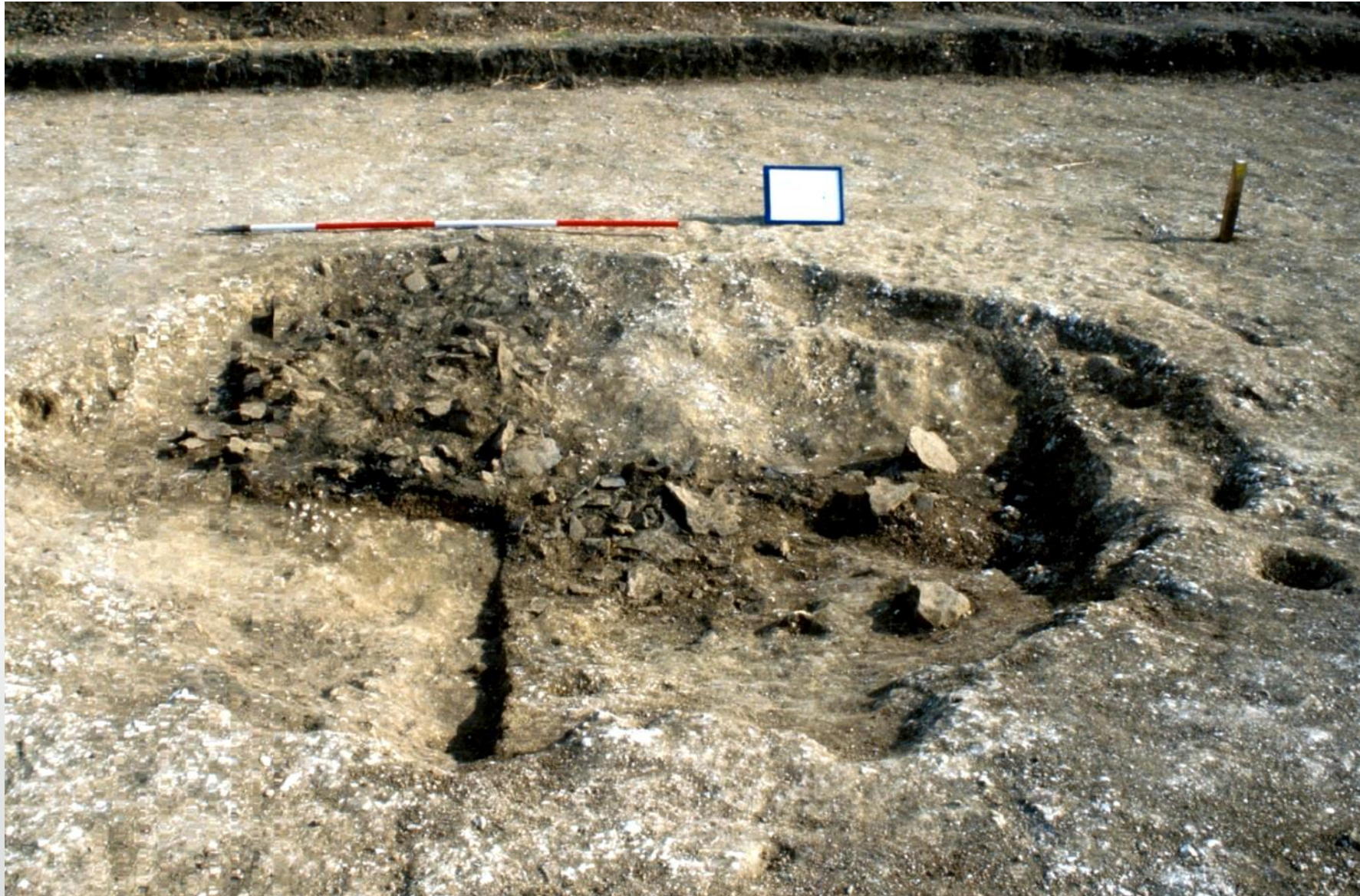


# Stone burials





## Late medieval - stone burning



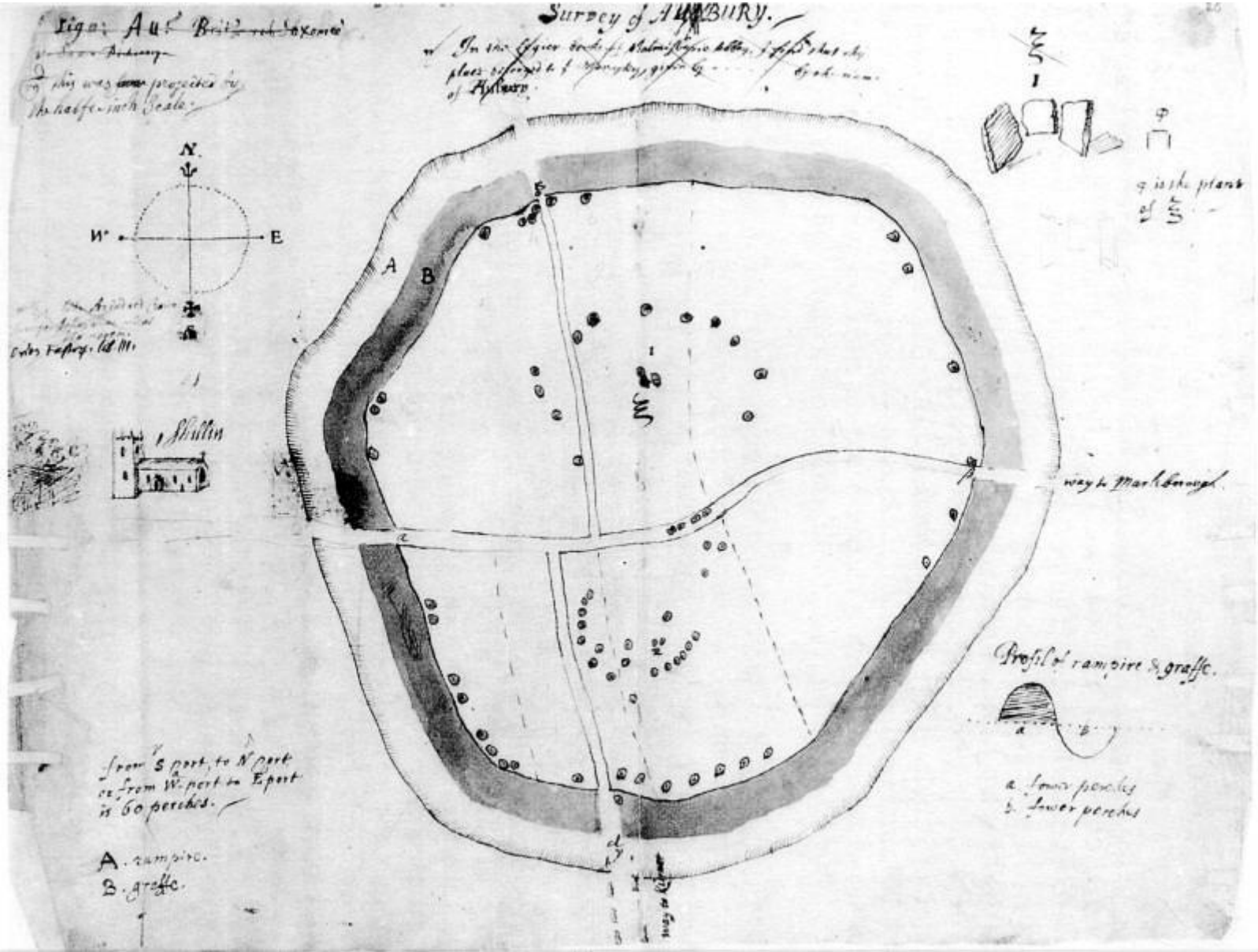


# An Abury 'atto de fe' May 20 1724





# John Aubrey (1649)



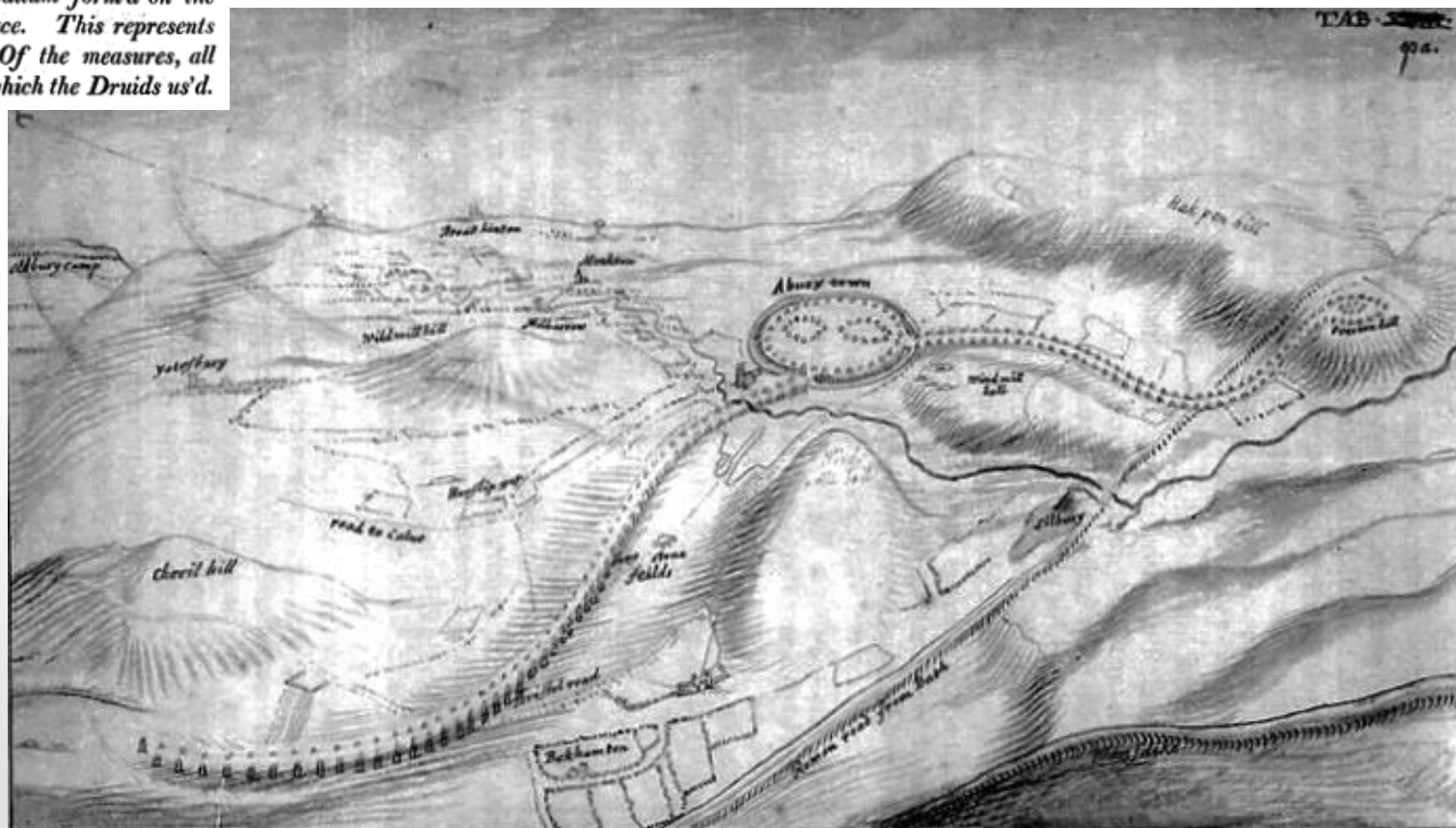


# William Stukeley (1712-1719)

## A B U R Y

### CHAP. IV.

*The figure of the temple of Abury is a circle and snake. Hakpen, another oriental word still preserved here, meaning the serpent's head. The chorography of Abury. A description of the great circle of stones 1400 foot in diameter. Of the ditch inclosing it. The vallum form'd on the outside, like an amphitheater to the place. This represents the circle in the hieroglyphic figure. Of the measures, all referring to the ancient eastern cubit which the Druids us'd.*



Præhonorabili D<sup>no</sup> Patrono plurimum colendo PETRO D<sup>no</sup> KING summo Magnæ Britannie Cancellario, Tabulam L. M. D. W. Stukeley  
A general view of the DRUID temple at ABURY in north wylshires, drawn by W. Stukeley 1724.



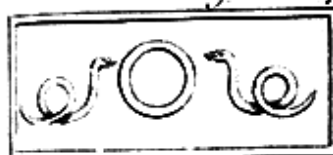
— Quamvis oculus nulli Tarda reclusus  
Mullus, ut fugiens Præcipit spectata, fuit auris  
Pura sonus vocis. — De M. XII.



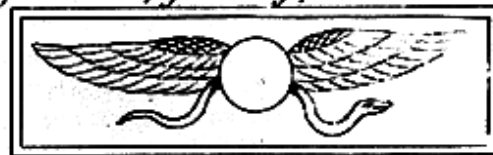
*The antient Symbols of the deity.*



*the deity thus exprest on the impostes at Persepolis.*



*thus upon Chinese gates.*



*thus on Egyptian monuments.*



*on a wall in  
Pagan. mens. Isaca.  
P. 22*



*ifac table*



*ifac table*



*ifac table.*



*ifac table.*

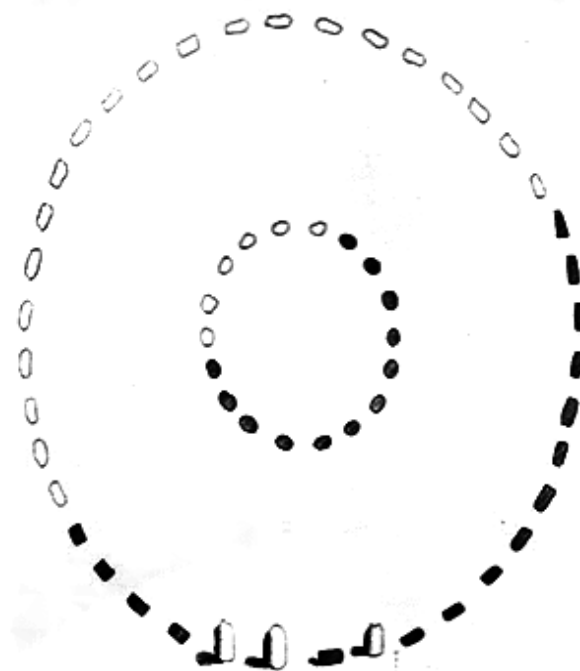


*ifac table.*

*Reverendissimo Presuli Iohanni Archiepiscopo Cantuariensi.  
humillime d.d. W. Stukeley.*

Plate 7. 'The antient Symbols of the deity', etching and engraving, after a drawing by William Stukeley, published in *Abury* (1743) compare with plate 9.

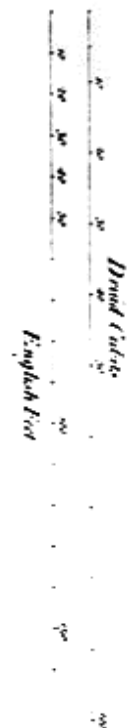
TAB. XX.  
P. 38.



*The HAKPEN or  
snakes head temple on  
Overton hill call'd the  
Sanctuary.*

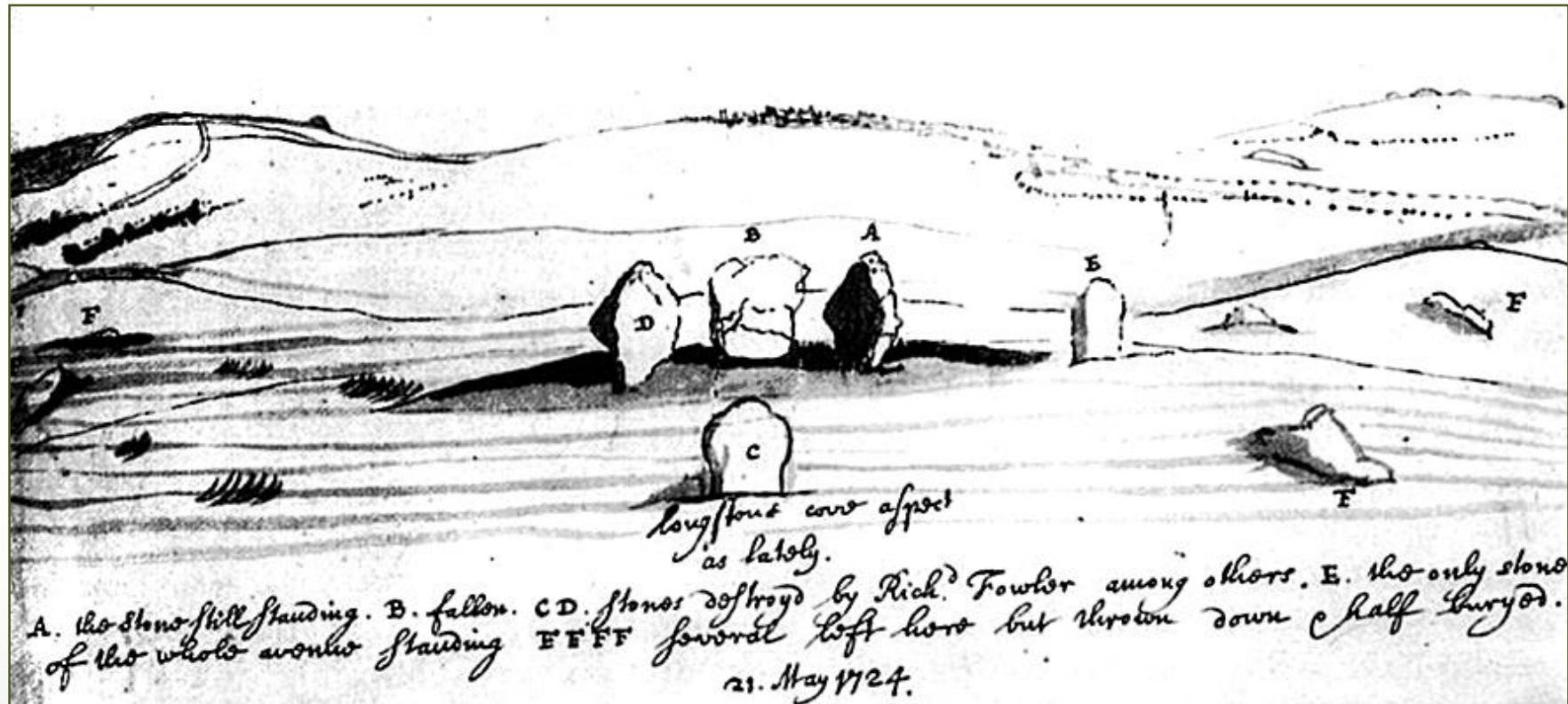


*from*





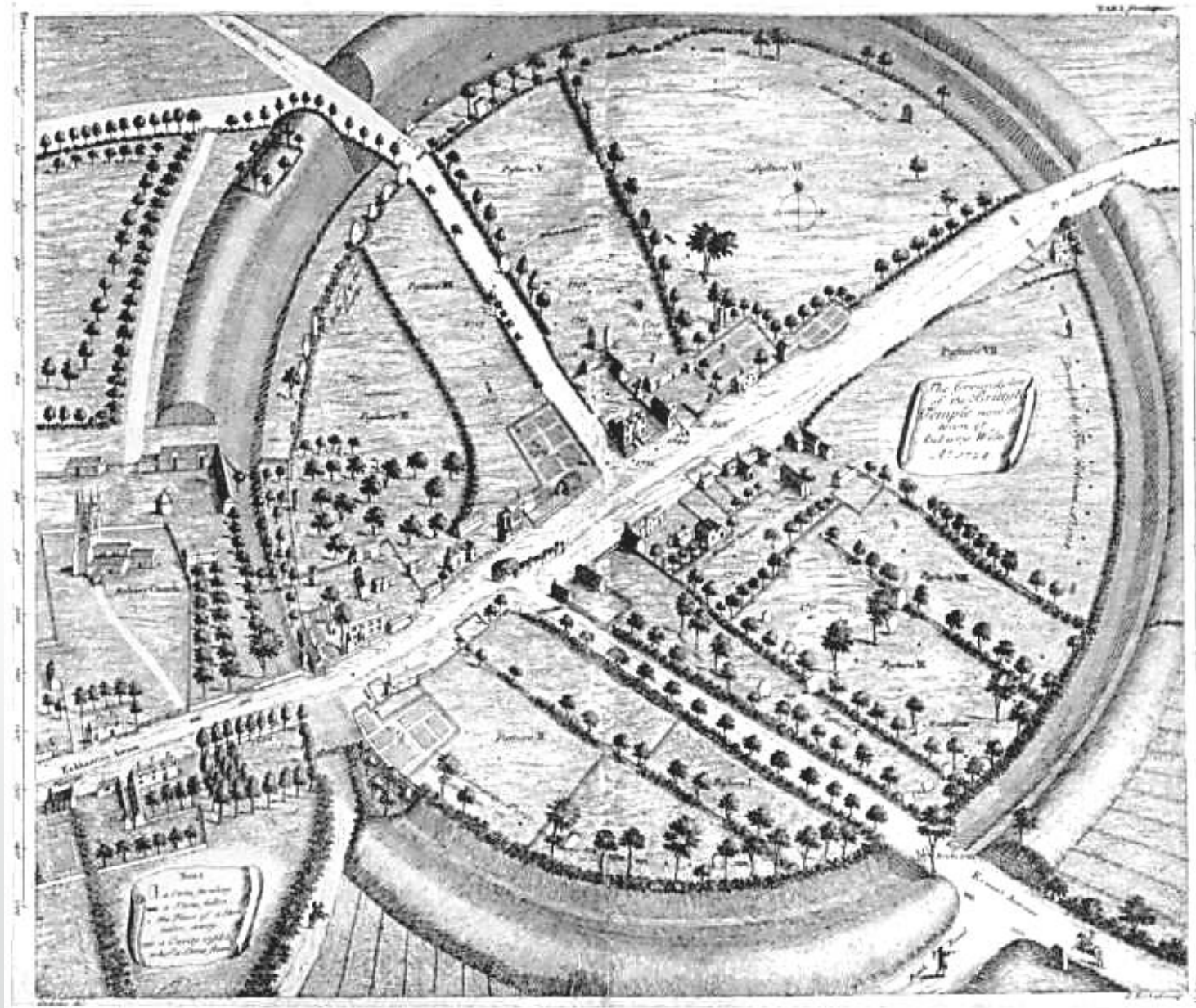
# Stukeley's legacy – an 'authentic' Avebury



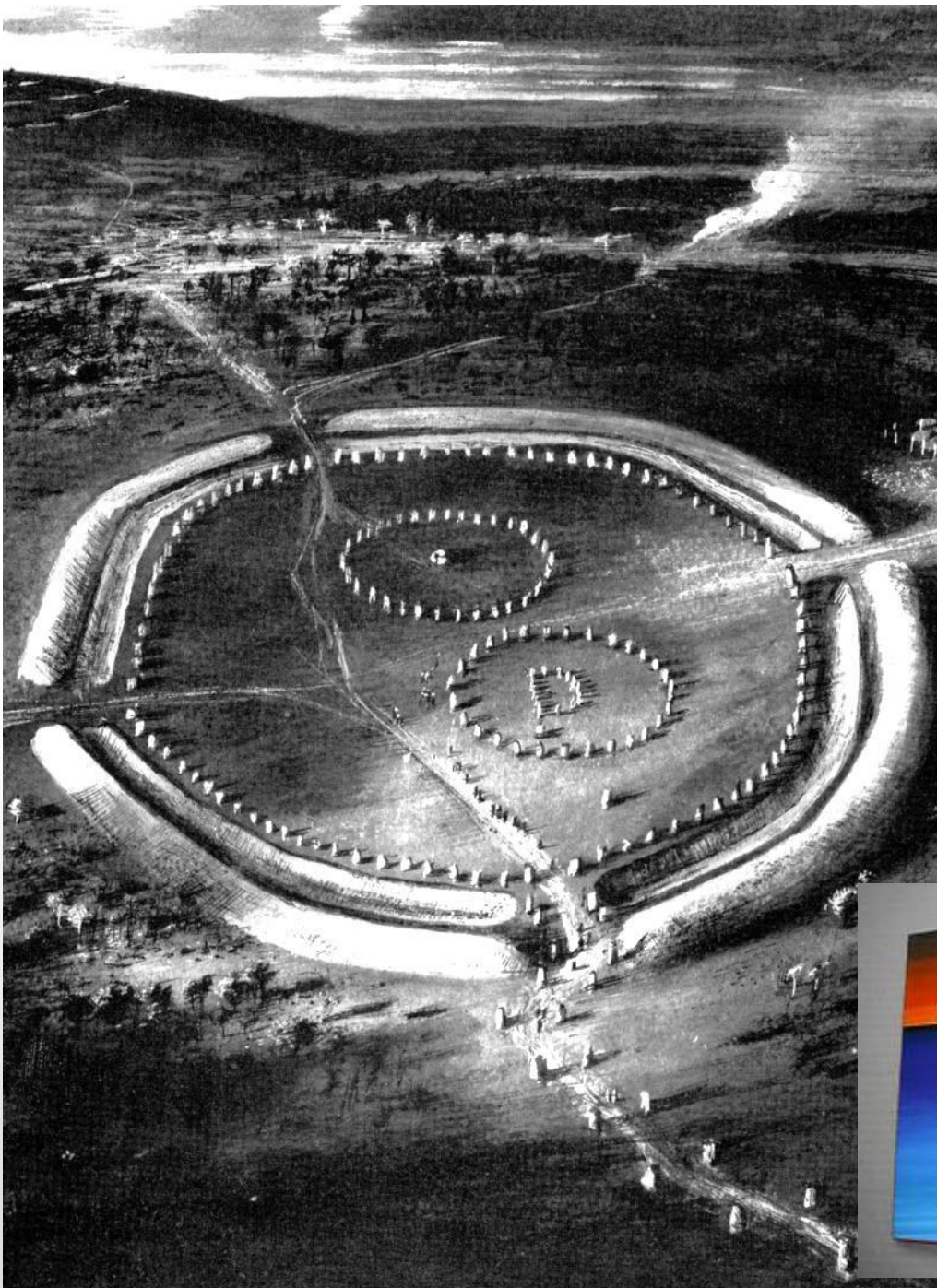
- The serpent and proto-Christianity – both central to Stukeley's observations and interpretations – have little real resonance today
- His real legacy, is the myth of a once glorious monument whose decline and destruction he 'documented' and whose original plan he 'recovered'
- Which requires Avebury once to have been in a state of 'completion' ...



# ‘Abury’, blueprint of the temple







[http://www.a...](#)
avebury then

HOME

AVEBURY THEN

AVEBURY NOW

MAP OF AREA

THE VILLAGE

FIRST ENCOUNTER

INTRODUCTION

THE DITCH & BANK

THE BARBER STONE

SURVIVING STONES

THE SHAME

THE MARMALADE MAN

J. AUBREY & W. STUKELEY

THE COVE

THE OBELISK

THE ENTRANCE STONES

ANOMALOUS STONES

HOLES IN STONES

WEST KENNET AVENUE

BECKHAMPTON AVENUE

FALKNER'S CIRCLE

THE SANCTUARY

THE LONGSTONES

SILBURY HILL

WEST KENNET LONG BARROW

EAST KENNET LONG BARROW

WINDMILL HILL

THE ENCLOSURES

THE RIDGEWAY

THE CHALK EFFECT

THE CIVIL WAR

CROP CIRCLES

PLAIN STONES

AVEBURY CHRONOLOGY

THEORIES & LINKS

A PRESENT FROM THE PAST

CHATBOX

WALLPAPERS

CONTACT AUTHOR

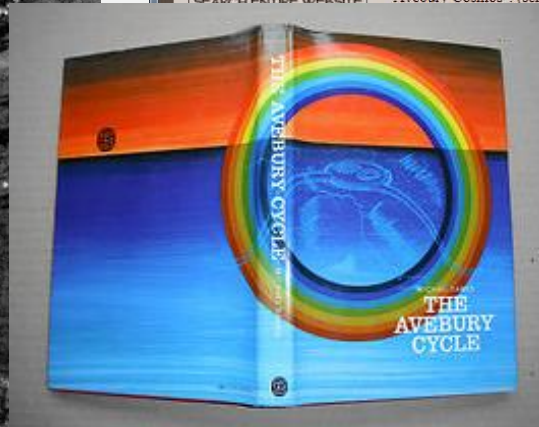
GRAPHIC FALTER WEBSITE

AVEBURY THEN

When visiting Avebury today the size of some of the stones is the feature that leaves a lasting impression. As it probably does with most visitors, but when the circle was first constructed the most striking feature must have been the ditch and bank which had been dug from the solid chalk of the chalk downs. Excavations have revealed that, due to erosion and silting, the ditch today is now only one foot deep and the bank much reduced in height. Not having access to a time-machine the only way to see the spectacle Avebury must once have presented is through the minds-eye. Based on the evidence available this is my own impression of how the south-west quadrant of the henge might appear to a visitor.

We are indebted to the archaeologists who seek the pieces of the Avebury puzzle for it is their efforts that any of us can attempt to see a truthful picture at all.

Below is a spectacular re-creation of how the henge may have appeared when viewed from the south. It has been made by Nicholas Mann who has kindly allowed it to be reproduced here. The image is titled "Avebury Cosmos". (scroll to view).



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## The Logic of Empirical Proof

### A Note on the Course of the Beckhampton Avenue

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#### Abstract

After 150 years of archaeological skepticism toward Stukeley's nineteenth-century claim for a Beckhampton avenue in the Avebury monuments, Gillings et al. (2008) have finally confirmed that it did in fact exist. However, contra Stukeley, they only allow its existence up to the site of the "Longstones Cove," and dispute its continuation further to the south-west to Fox Covert, as claimed by Stukeley. This article attempts to demonstrate that by documentary method, field survey, geophysics, site excavation, and the method of critical experiment, this interpretation fails the normal standards of the logic of empirical proof. This failure to sustain their case leaves Stukeley's claim for the Beckhampton avenue continuing to Fox Covert standing and open to further investigation.

**Keywords:** Stukeley; Beckhampton avenue; Avebury; proof; archaeoastronomy



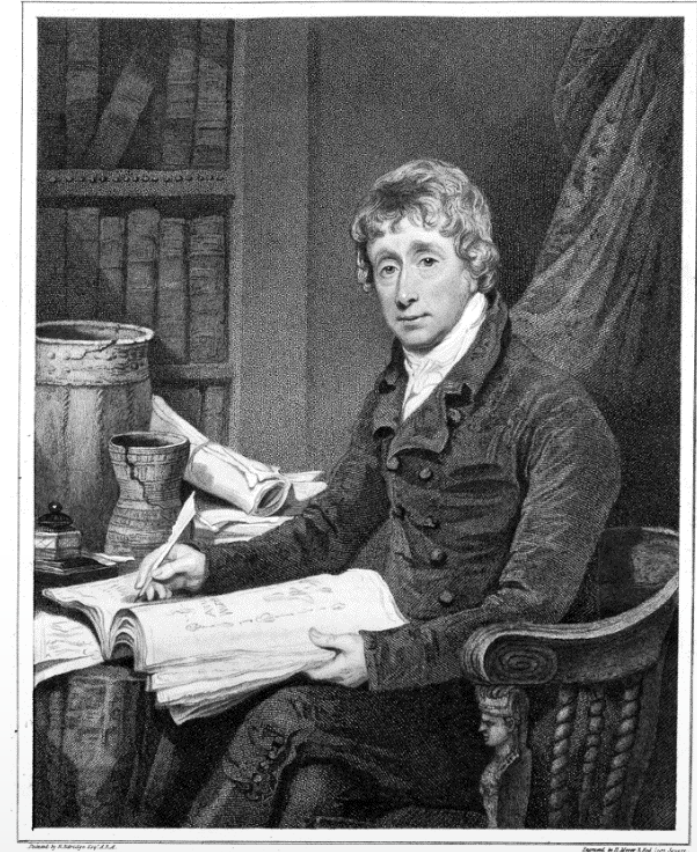
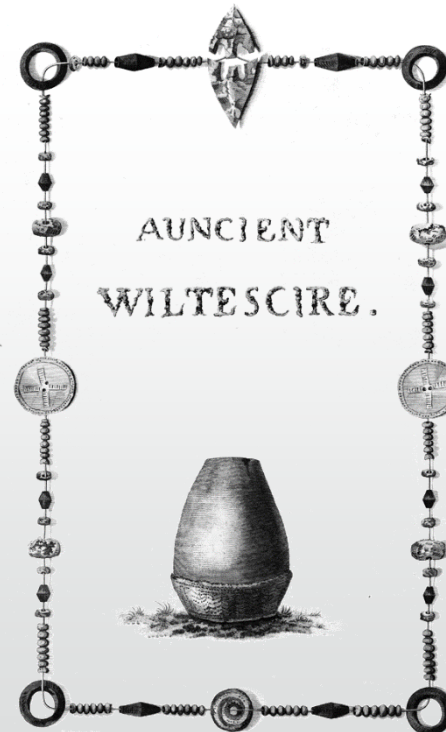
## INTRODUCTION.

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WE SPEAK FROM FACTS, NOT THEORY.

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SUCH is the motto I adopt, and to this text I shall most strictly adhere. I shall not seek amongst the fanciful regions of romance, an origin for our Wiltshire Britons, nor, by endeavouring to prove by whom, and at what period our island was first peopled, involve myself in a Celtic or Belgic controversy; \* neither shall I place too much reliance on the very imperfect traditions handed down to us by former antiquaries on this subject. I shall describe to you what we have found; what we have seen; in short, I shall tell you a plain unvarnished tale, and draw from it such conclusions as shall appear not only reasonable, but even uncontradictable.



SIR RICHARD COLT HOARE, BART

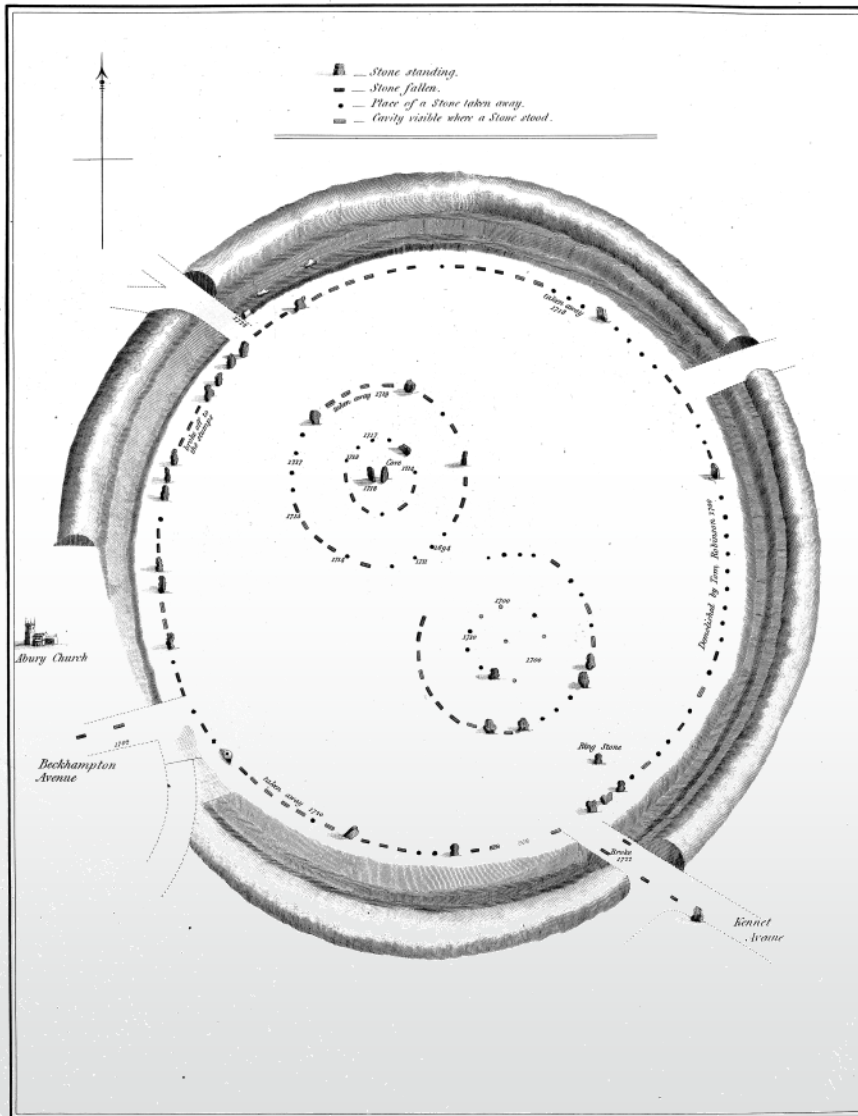
OF STOURHEAD WILTS.

ÆTATIS LXII.



# Richard Colt Hoare (1812)

PLATE XII.



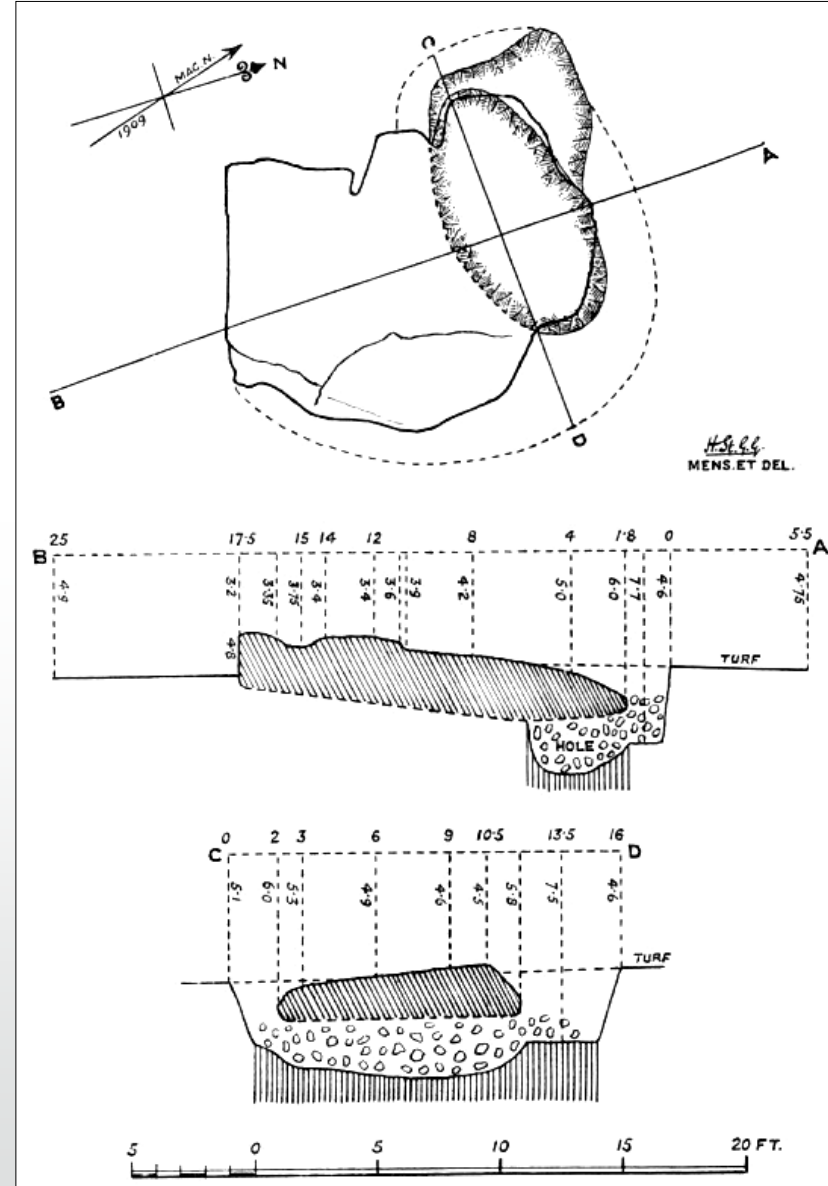
THE TEMPLE AT ABURY,  
Surveyed by D. Stukeley, in 1721.

PLATE XIII.



THE TEMPLE AT ABURY  
Surveyed AD. 1812







# Alexander Keiller (1934-39)



- Keiller re-erected many of the stones of Avebury and the West Kennet Avenue
- Begun a process of 'cleaning' the monument of its contemporary dwellings and businesses
- This process was continued by the National Trust in the 1940s and 1950s





- Its later prehistoric form may have developed over a millennium or more, separated by enormous transformations in society and beliefs



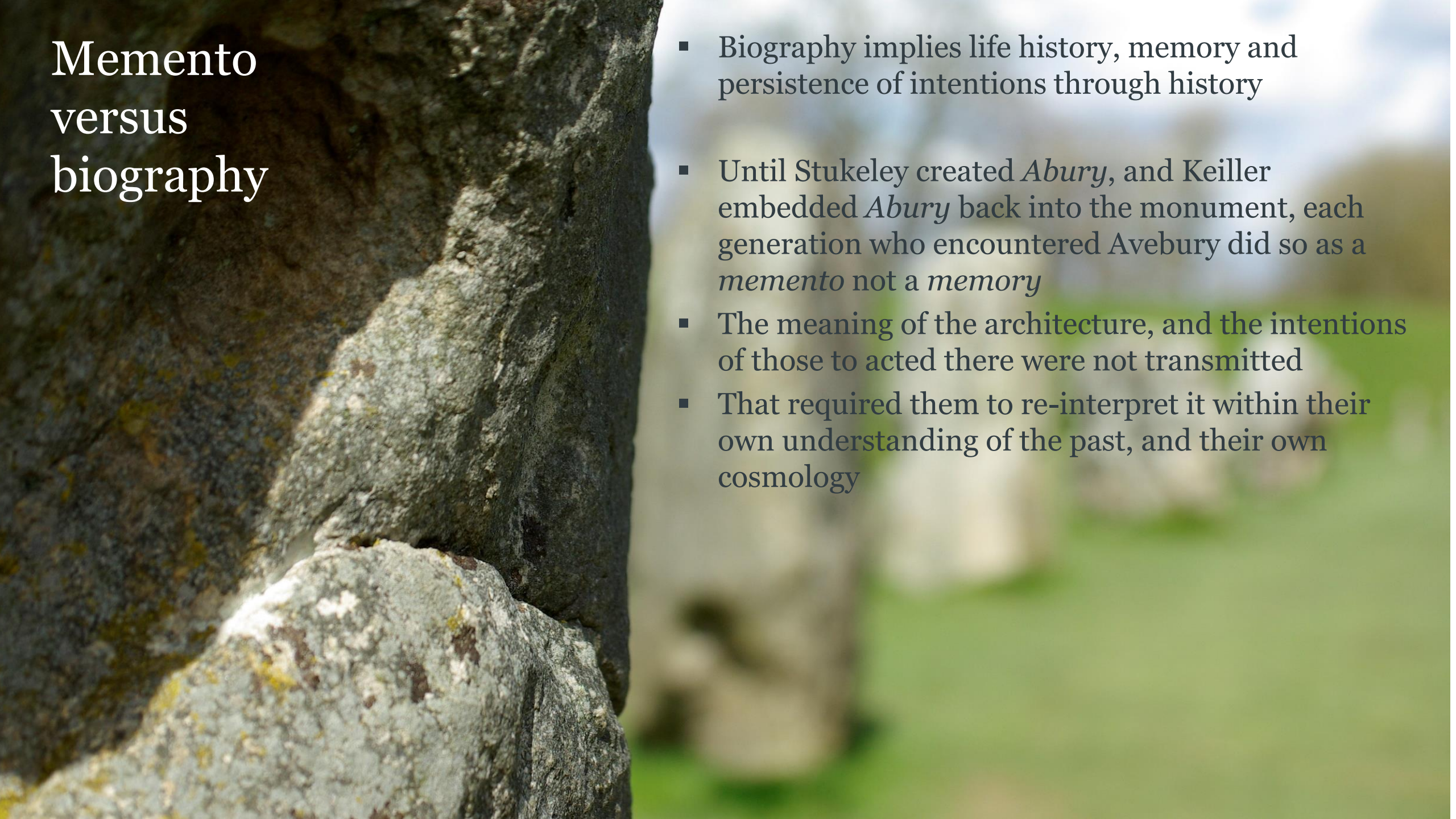


- While the architecture has/had meaning and significance, it does not fit into a single interpretative scheme



- Avebury does not have a single meaning, or ‘solution’ ..

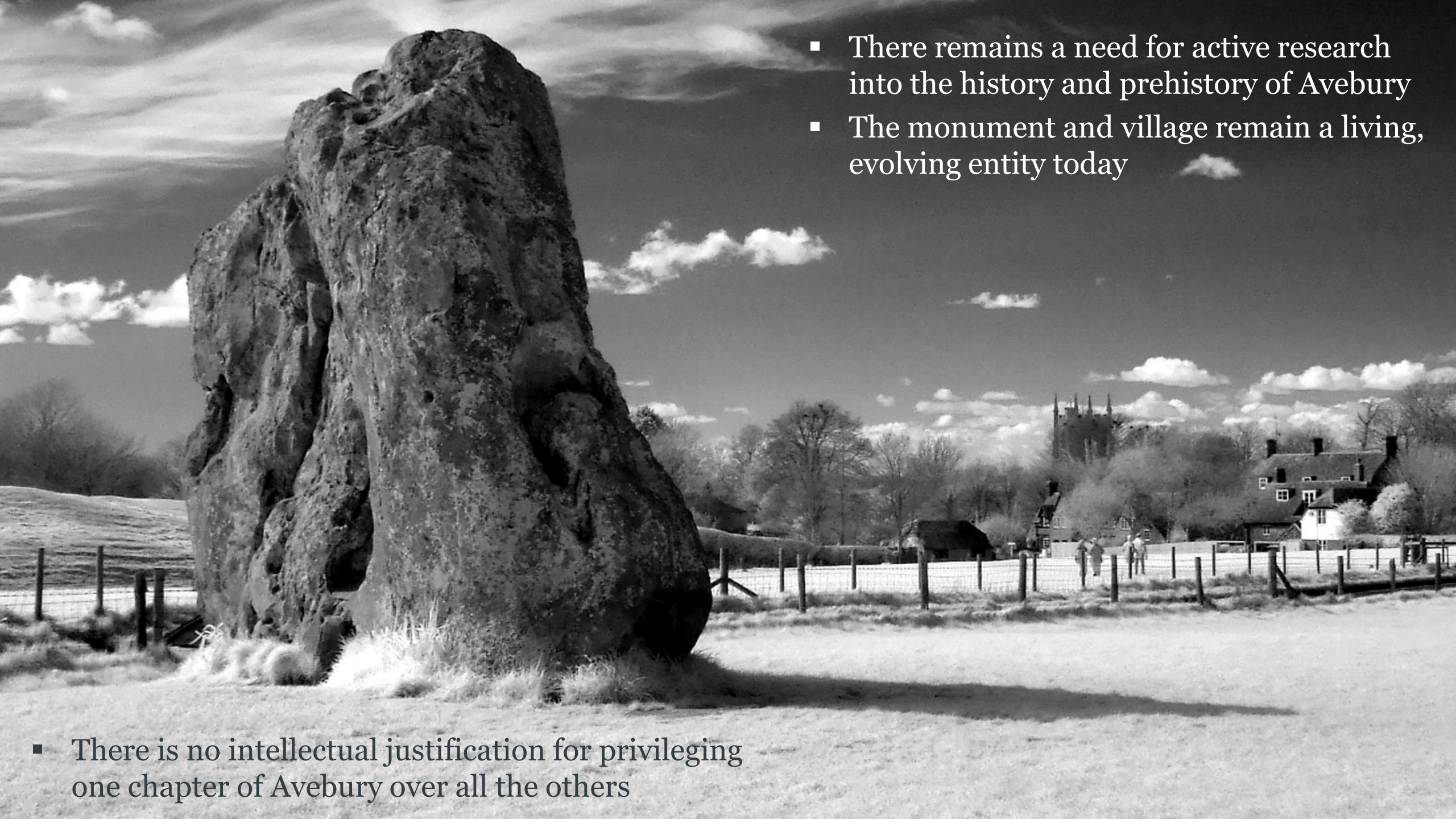




# Memento versus biography

- Biography implies life history, memory and persistence of intentions through history
- Until Stukeley created *Abury*, and Keiller embedded *Abury* back into the monument, each generation who encountered Avebury did so as a *memento* not a *memory*
- The meaning of the architecture, and the intentions of those to acted there were not transmitted
- That required them to re-interpret it within their own understanding of the past, and their own cosmology





- There remains a need for active research into the history and prehistory of Avebury
- The monument and village remain a living, evolving entity today

- There is no intellectual justification for privileging one chapter of Avebury over all the others