

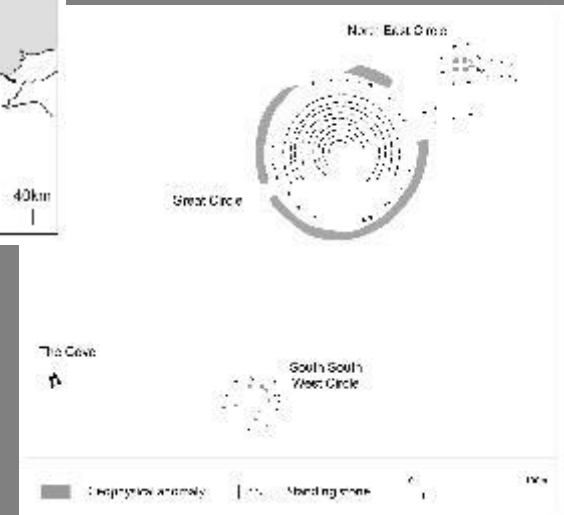
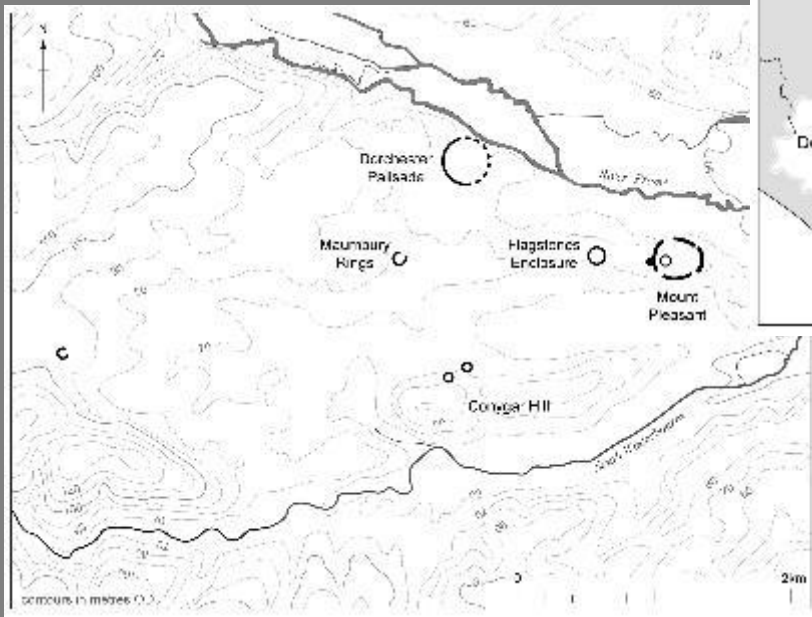
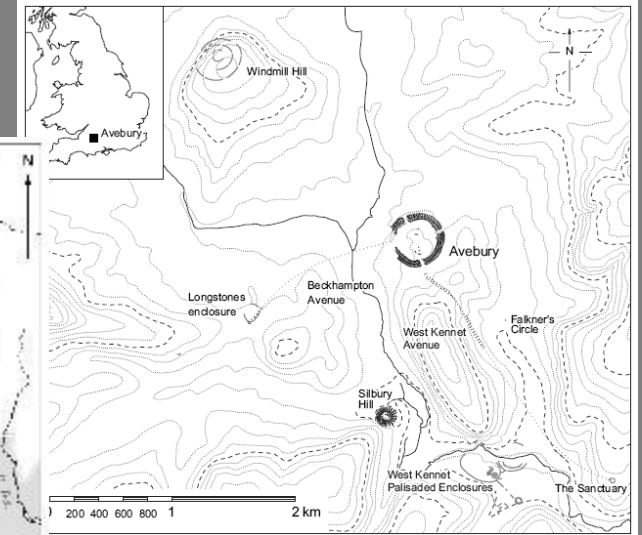
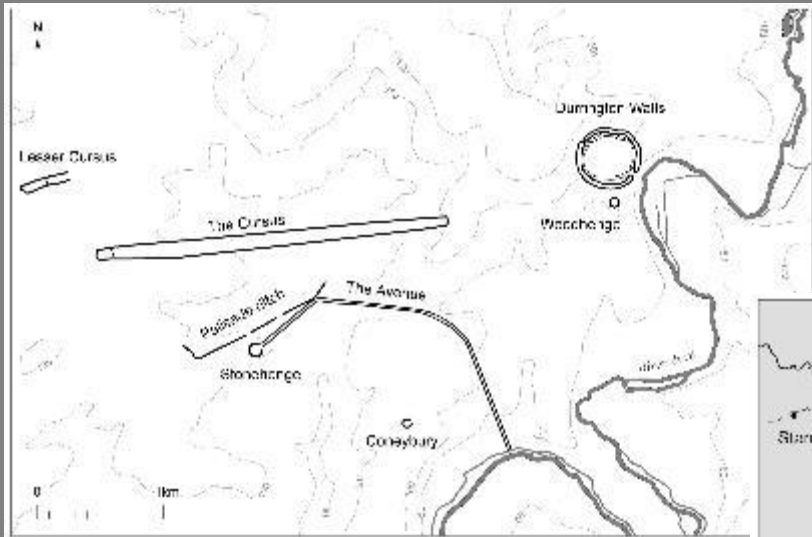
The why, when and where of great monument building in the Wessex landscape



Dr Joshua Pollard



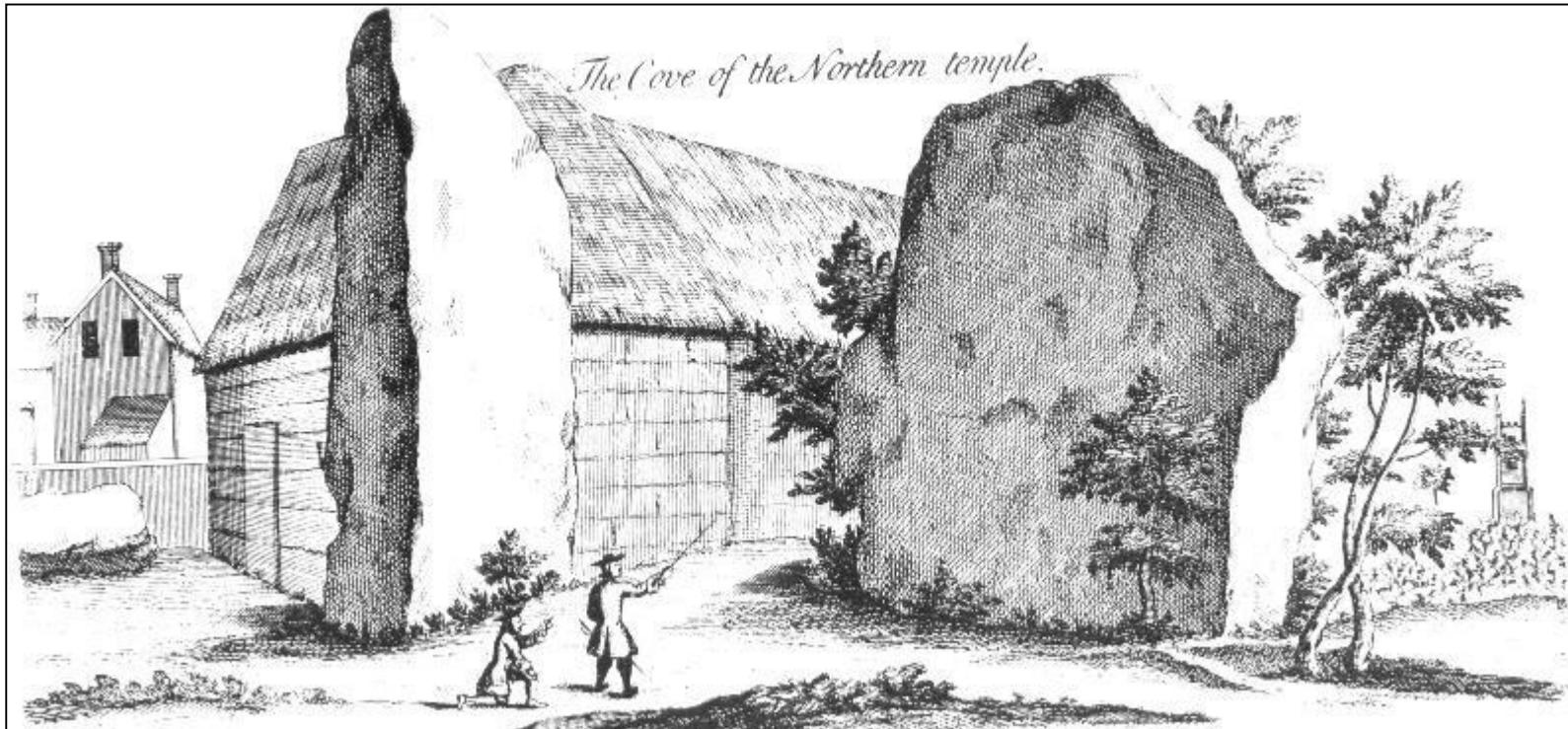
Later Neolithic monument complexes in Wessex and environs





A lengthy history of research into these monuments that goes back to the antiquarian traditions of the 17th-early 19th centuries (Aubrey, Stukeley, Colt Hoare, etc.).

But scientific understanding has a much shorter history.





Considerable work in the Stonehenge and Avebury landscapes since 2000 – Longstones Project, Stonehenge Riverside Project, Stones of Stonehenge Project, geophysical survey of the Stonehenge WHS, EH work at Silbury Hill and Marden

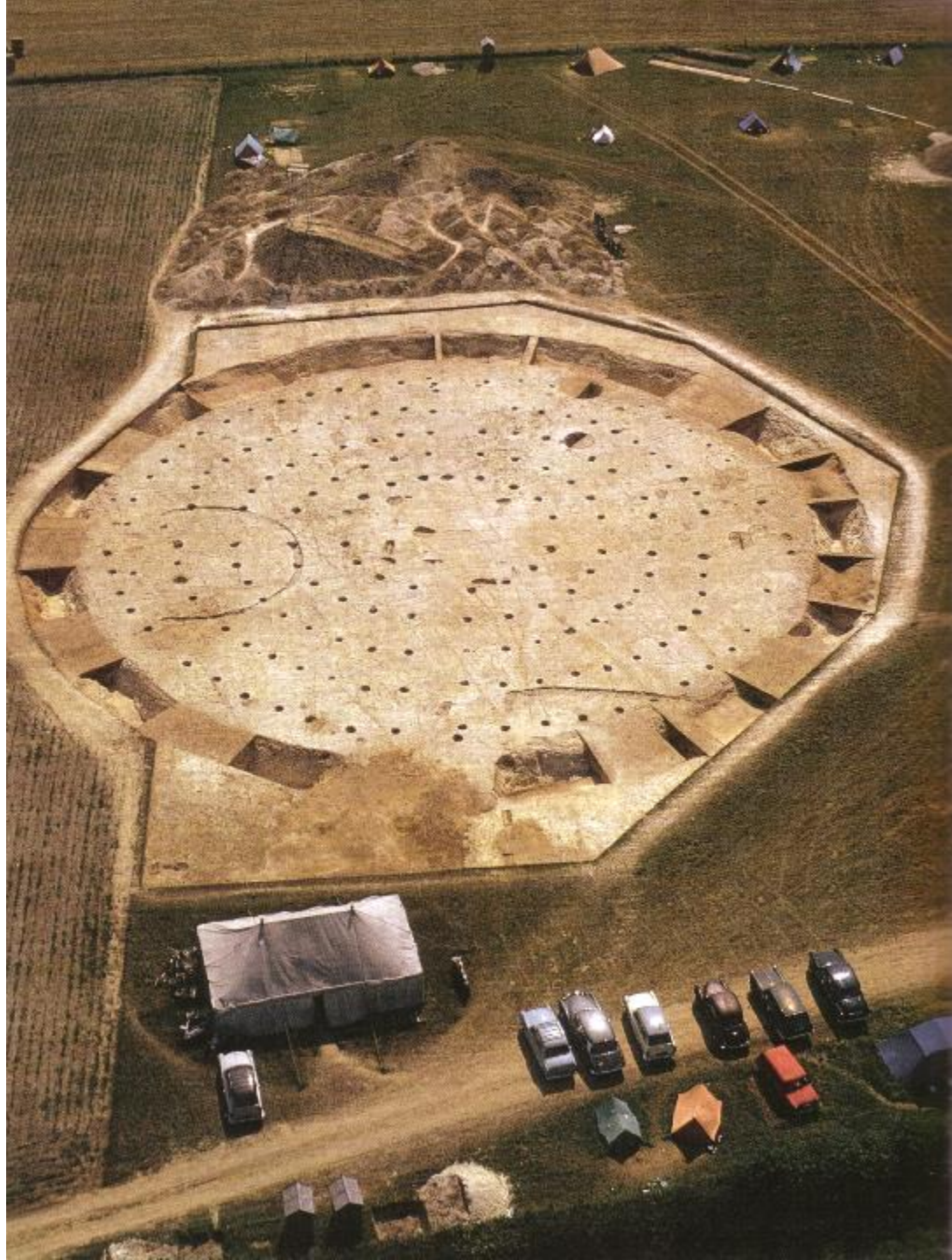


The events displayed in Wessex during the later Neolithic (c.3000-2400BC) are not typical of those of many other regions of Britain. They are remarkable, and we must account for this.

Why Wessex?

Why even make monuments, and why should they take the form they do?

They are the product of complex relations between people, various non-human agencies, landscape and histories of settlement.

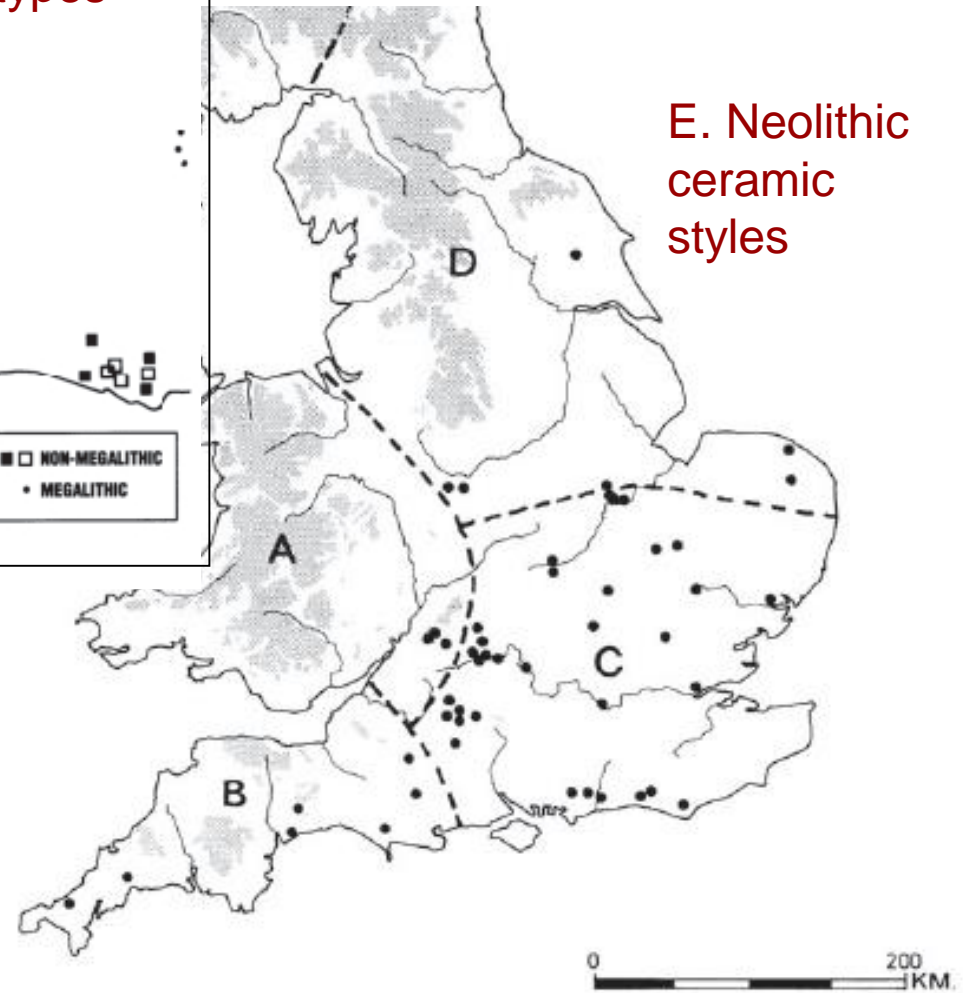
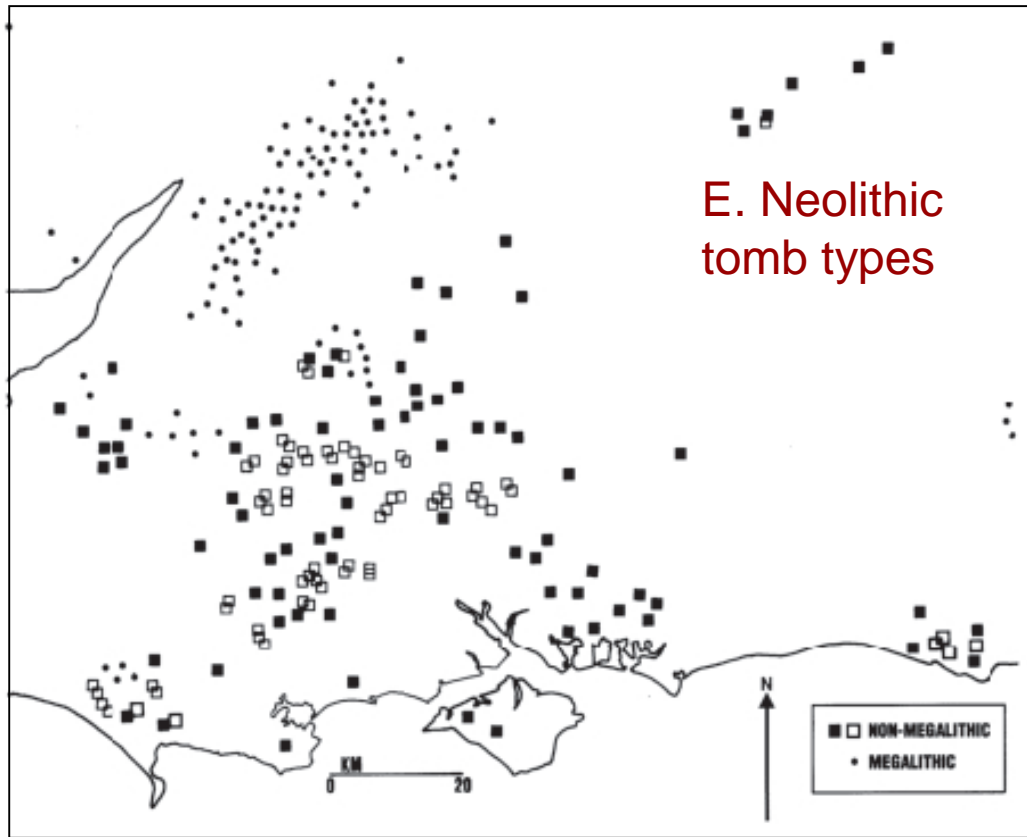


What made the Wessex chalk so special during the Neolithic and Bronze Age?

- Macro- and micro-scale issues

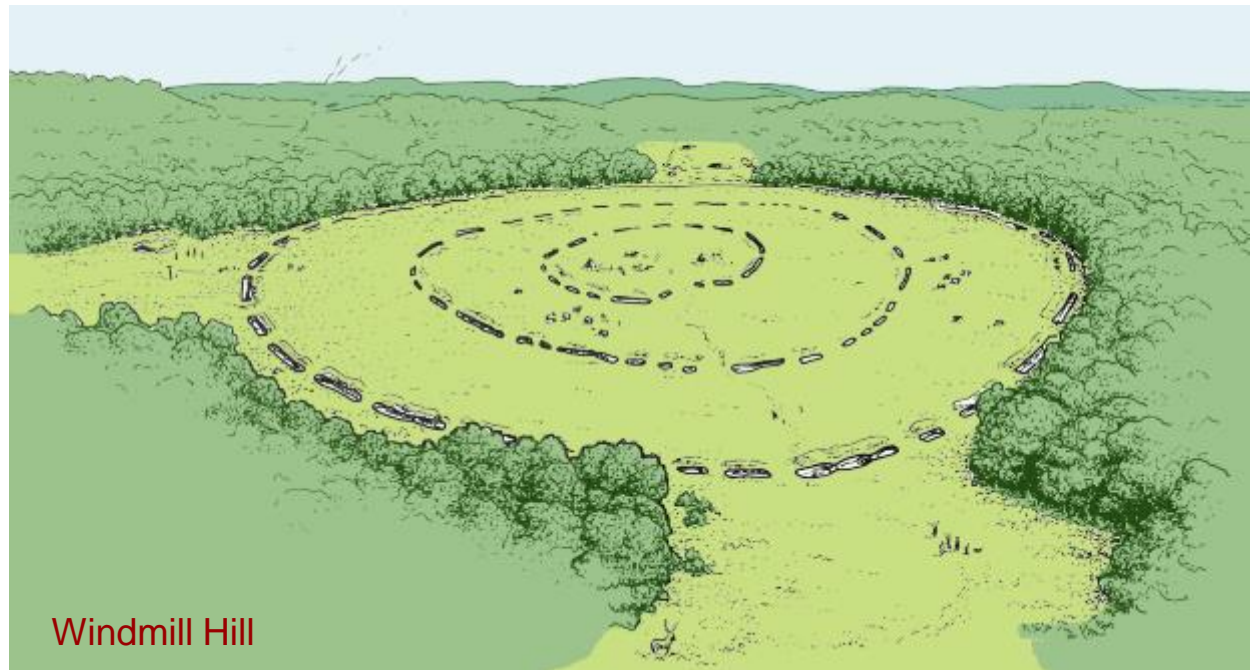
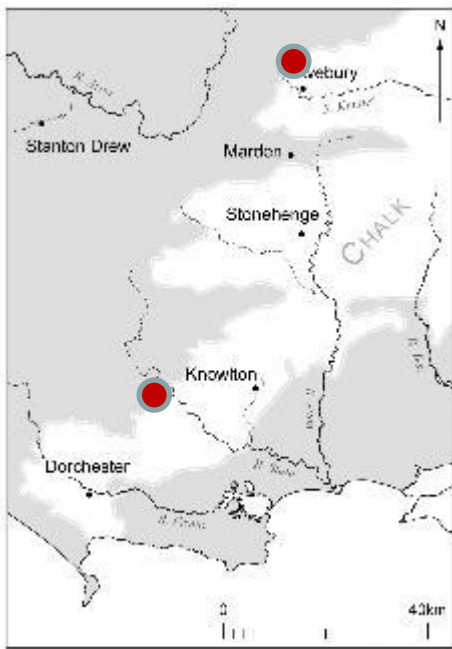
Macro

- Little late Mesolithic presence
- Its history and location at the junction of two Neolithic traditions of different origin
- Its topography
- Its elemental constituents and qualities – chalk, water and stone



Early Beginnings

A meeting point of western and eastern Neolithic traditions, both of different ancestry?



Windmill Hill



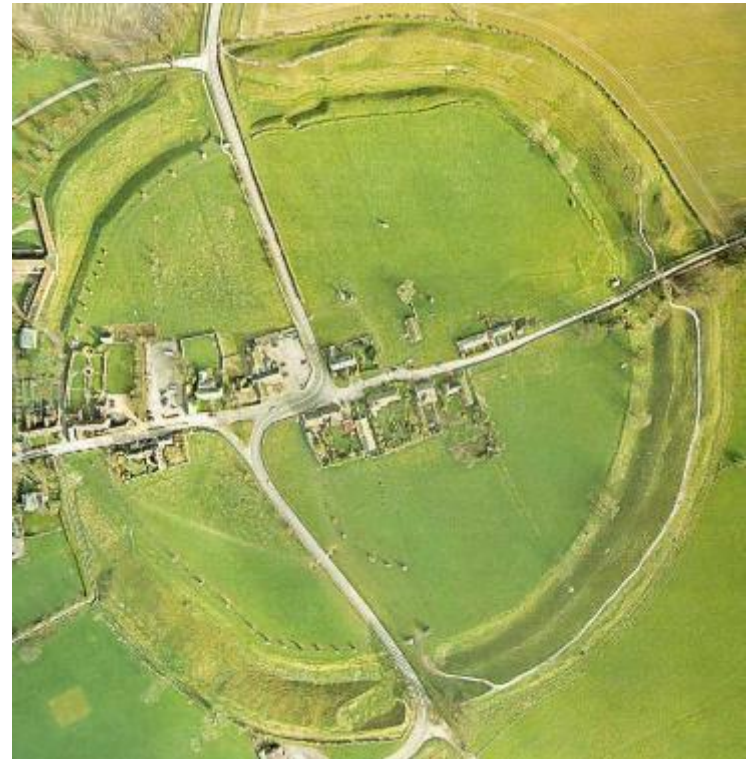
Hambledon Hill

The role of large enclosures (e.g. Windmill Hill and Hambledon Hill) in mediating contacts between different communities during the earlier 4th millennium BC (but not without tension). Artefactual and isotopic evidence for long-distance movement of animals and objects.

Note the location of the largest of these on the edge of the chalk.

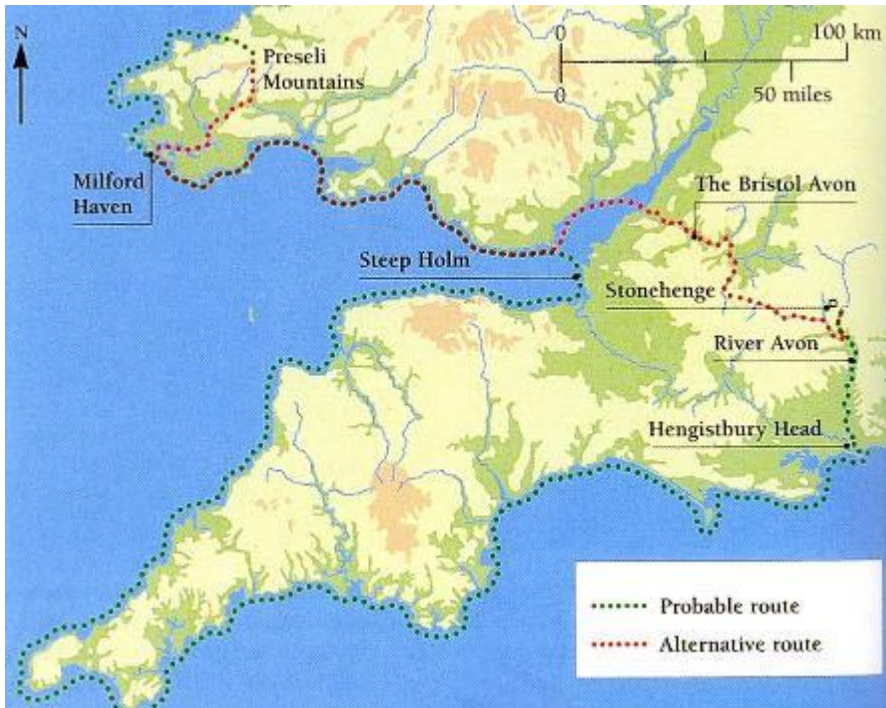


Even larger scale gatherings implied by the massive public monuments of the 3rd millennium BC. 'Spheres of influence' of the great monument complexes hinted at by isotopic signatures in animal bone. These had become potent places attracting far-flung communities.



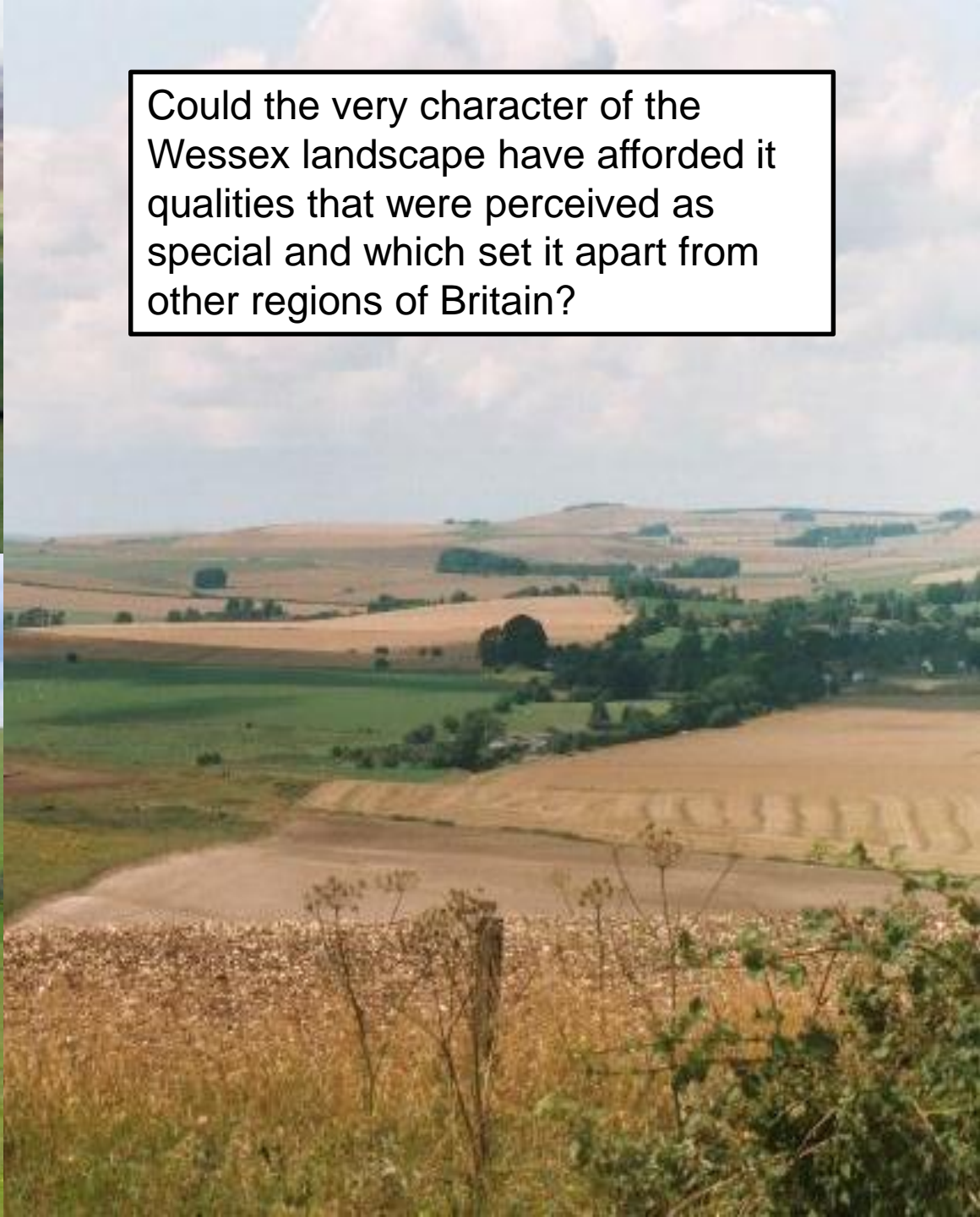


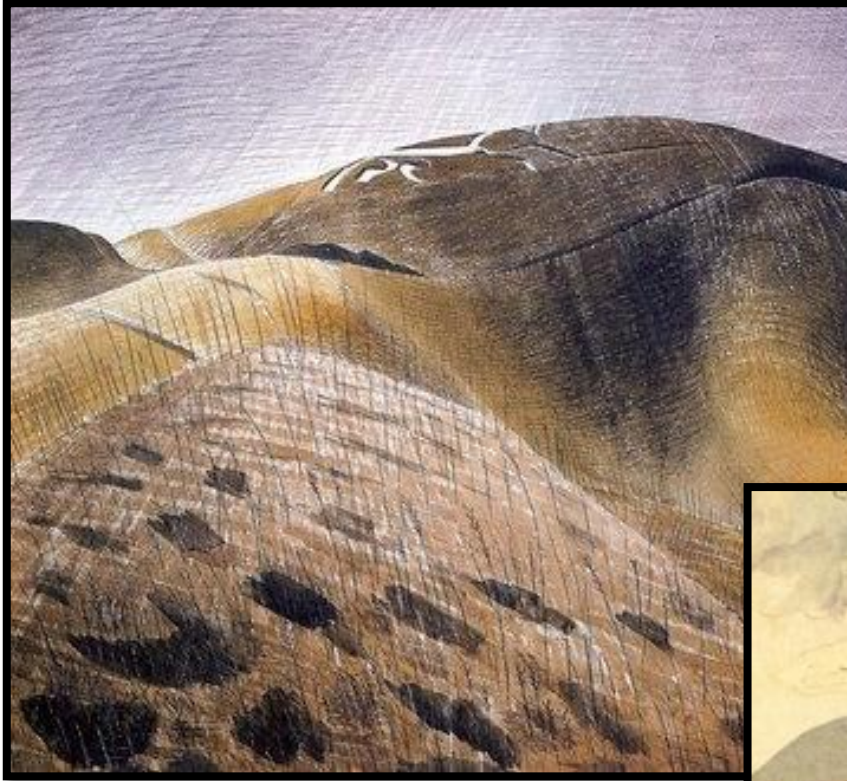
Spheres of influence dramatically illustrated by the Stonehenge 'bluestones' (dolerites, sandstone, rhyolites, volcanic ash), transported from the Preseli region of SW Wales, perhaps c.3000 BC.





Could the very character of the Wessex landscape have afforded it qualities that were perceived as special and which set it apart from other regions of Britain?

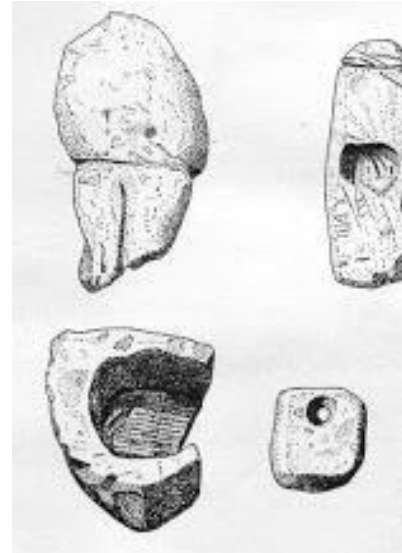




Shape, form, colour, weather effects – inspiration for 20th-century artists



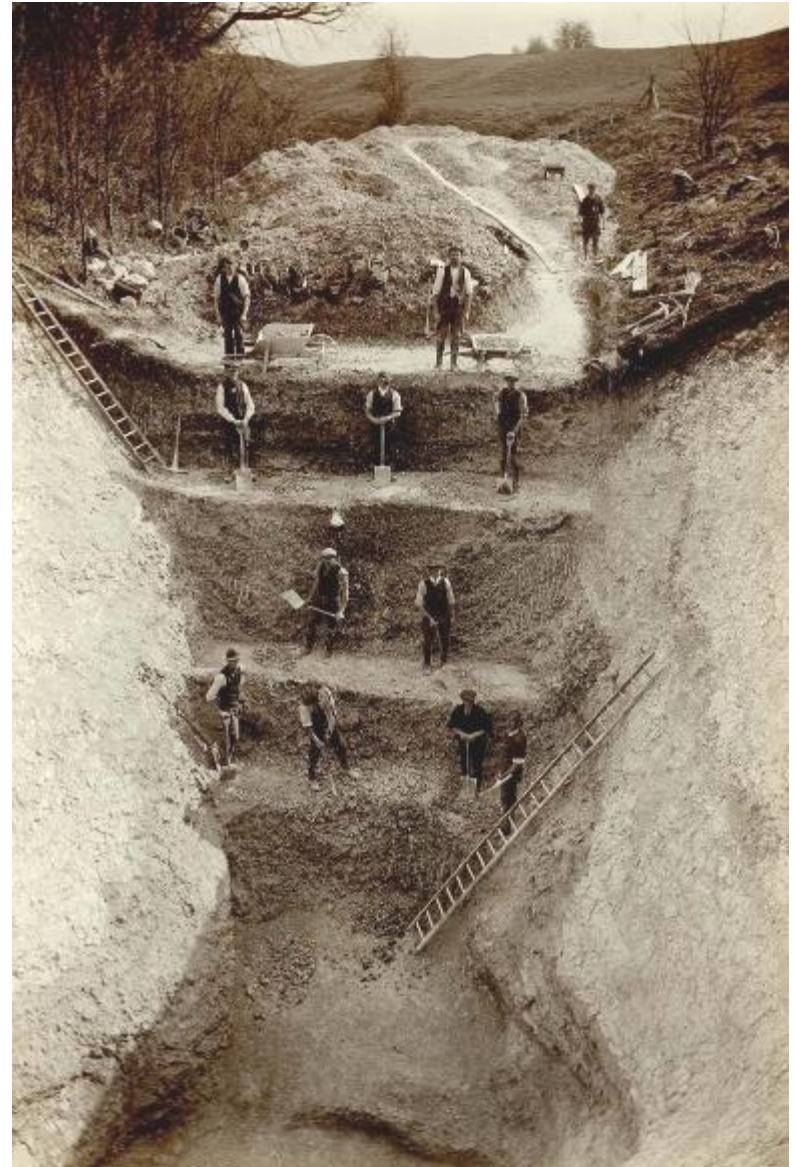
The qualities of chalk and chalkland landscapes – whiteness ('purity') and workability of chalk.

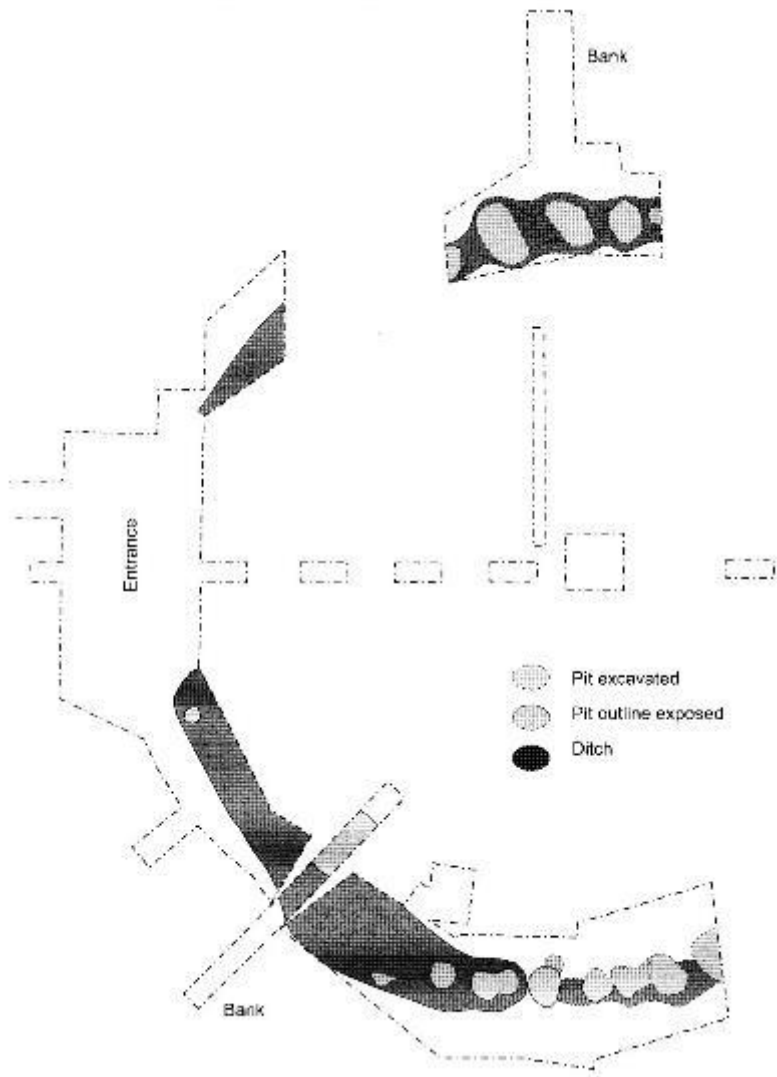


The geology of springs and winterbourne streams, and sarsen and flint



Accessing the deep – the henge ditch at Avebury





Maumbury Rings

A highly unusual henge with its series of deep shafts in the ditch base containing unusual deposits. As at Avebury, these deep excavations could have interfaced with the water table.





Micro- (local) scale matters

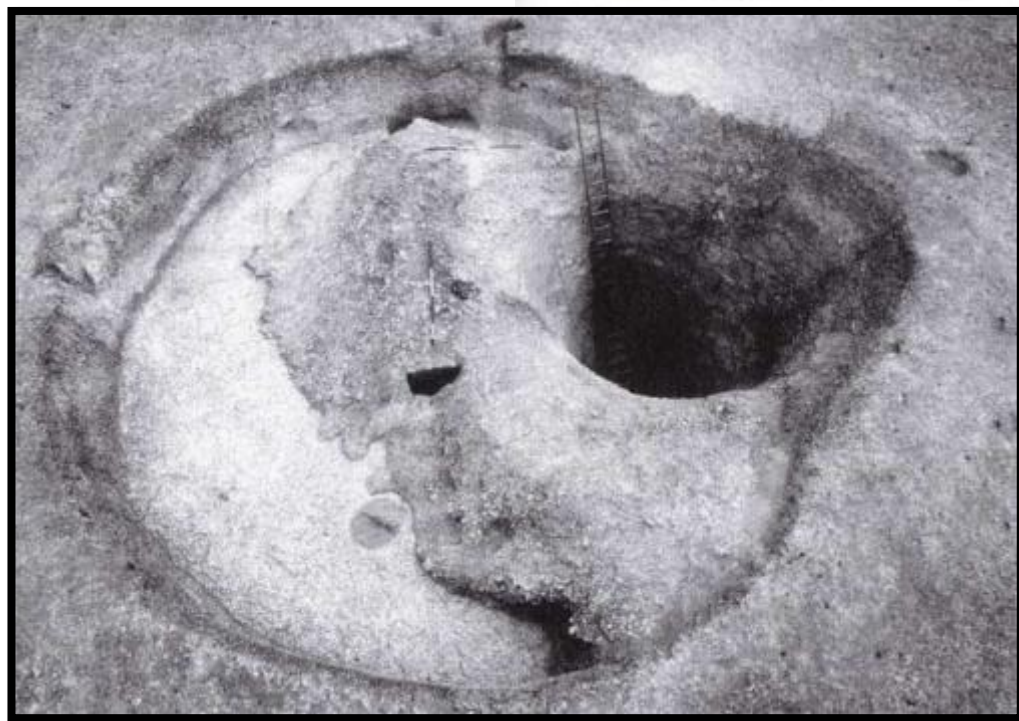
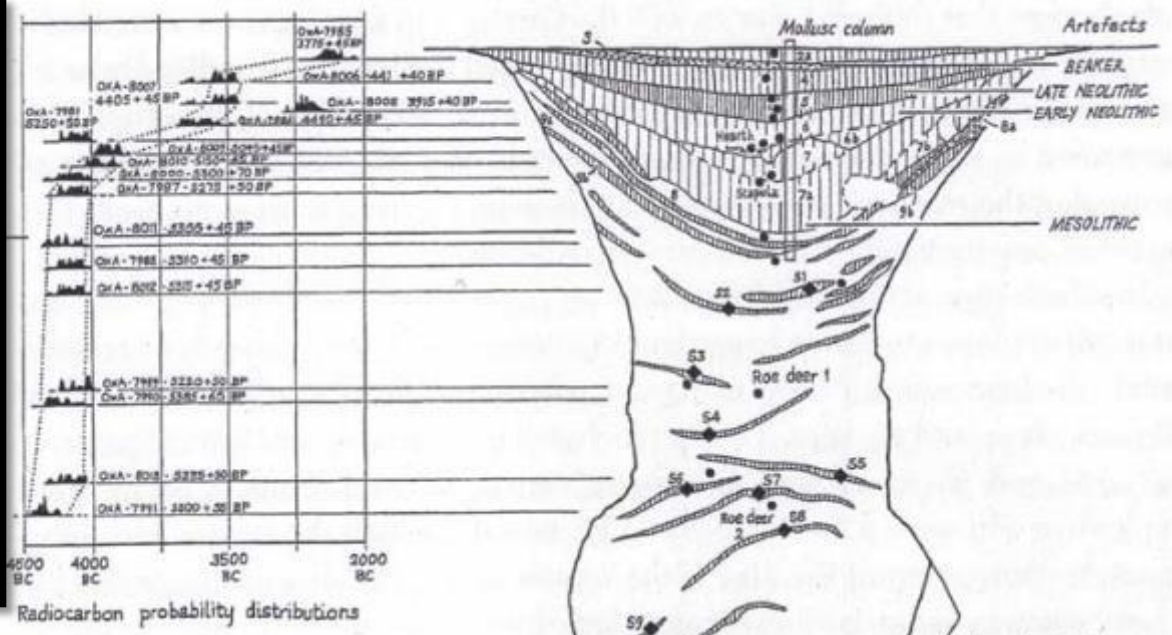
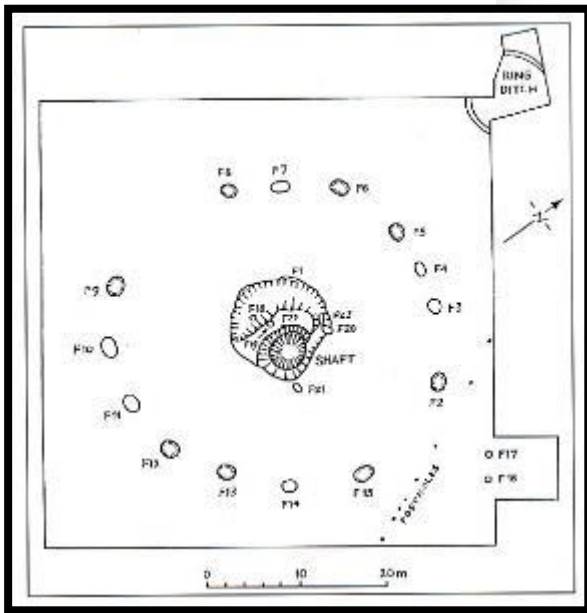
Do places become sacred because they are monumentalised (e.g. like a church that you build and consecrate), or is the process of monumentalisation indicative of prior significance to a place (e.g. the birthplace of Buddha at Lumbini)?

Histories, myths and significant features – that might be regarded as a manifestation of the supernatural – mattered.

The significance of natural features and monumental mimicry



Knowlton, Dorset



Monkton Up Wimborne and Fir Tree Field, Cranborne Chase



West Kennet Avenue, Avebury





Aerial-Cam/Adam Stanford



Aerial-Cam/Adam Stanford

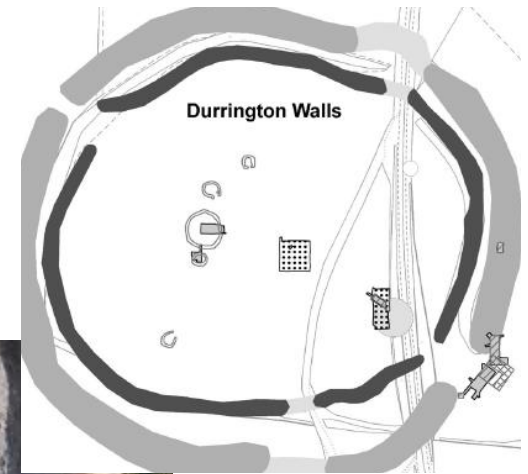
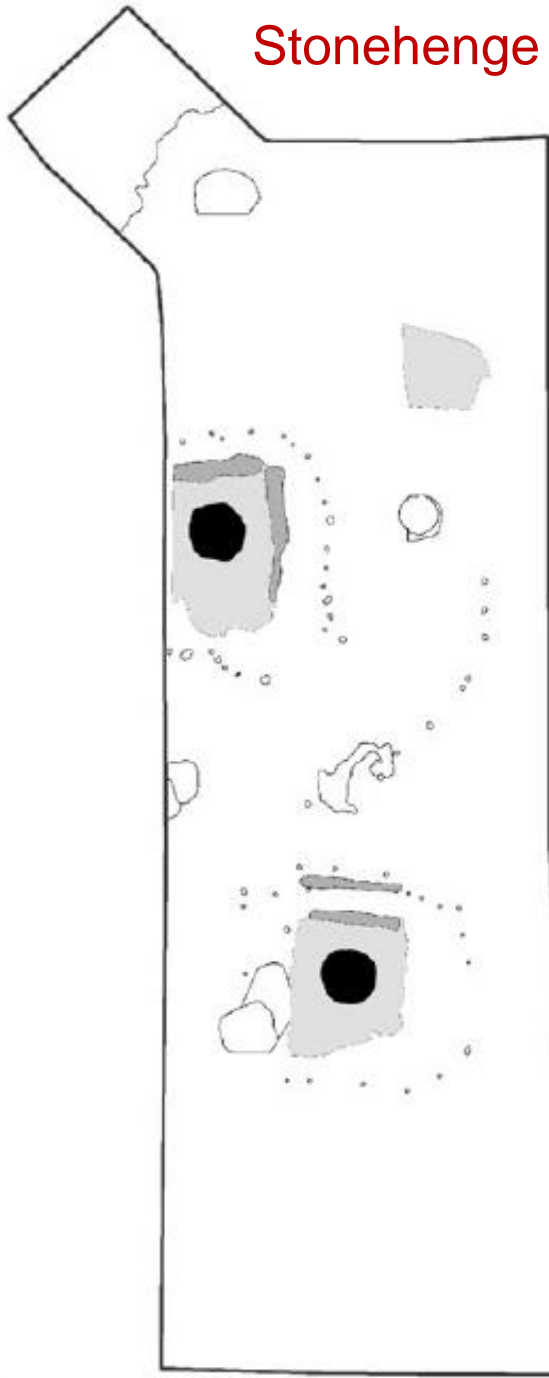




- How do the quotidian (the everyday) and the sacred intersect? These are not places that are devoid of contemporary settlement – they are not ‘ritual landscapes’.
- Histories of dwelling and monument building often merge
- Bradley 2005 – the ritualization of the routine/domestic sphere

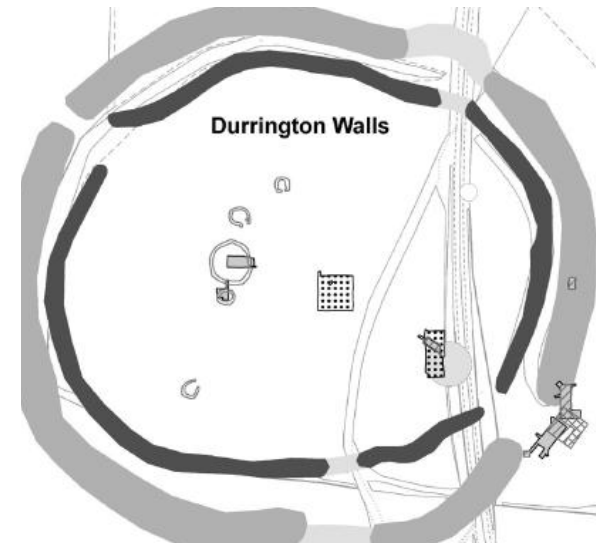
First we will look at the link between the quotidian and monumental architecture

Stonehenge and the house



Houses and Monumental architecture

Durrington Walls
East entrance houses



Durrington Western Circles

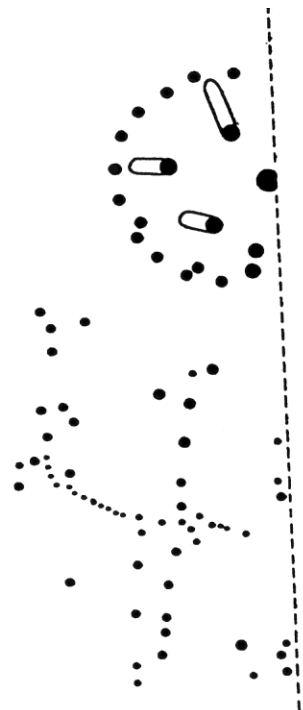
High status dwellings, origin or cult houses?

'Cleanliness' is surely indicative of status

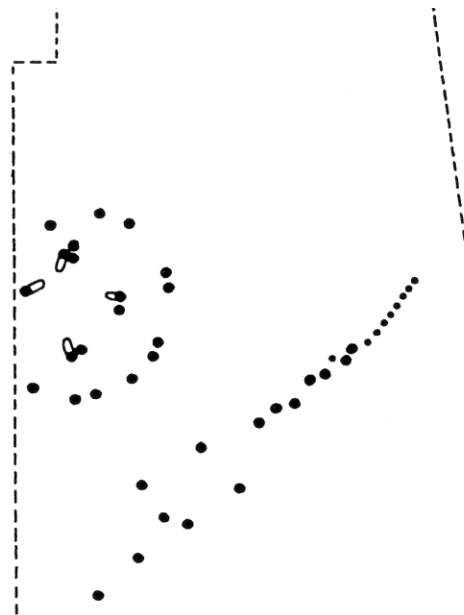




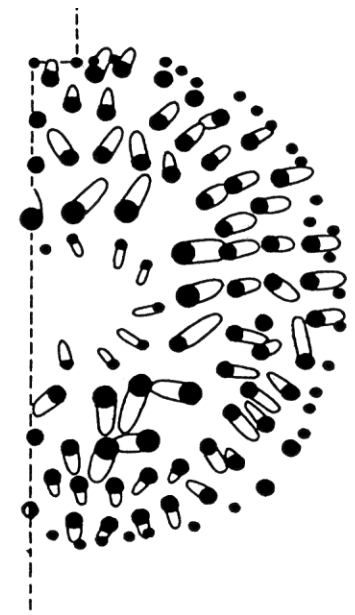
Larger square-in-circle structures south of Woodhenge



Northern Circle



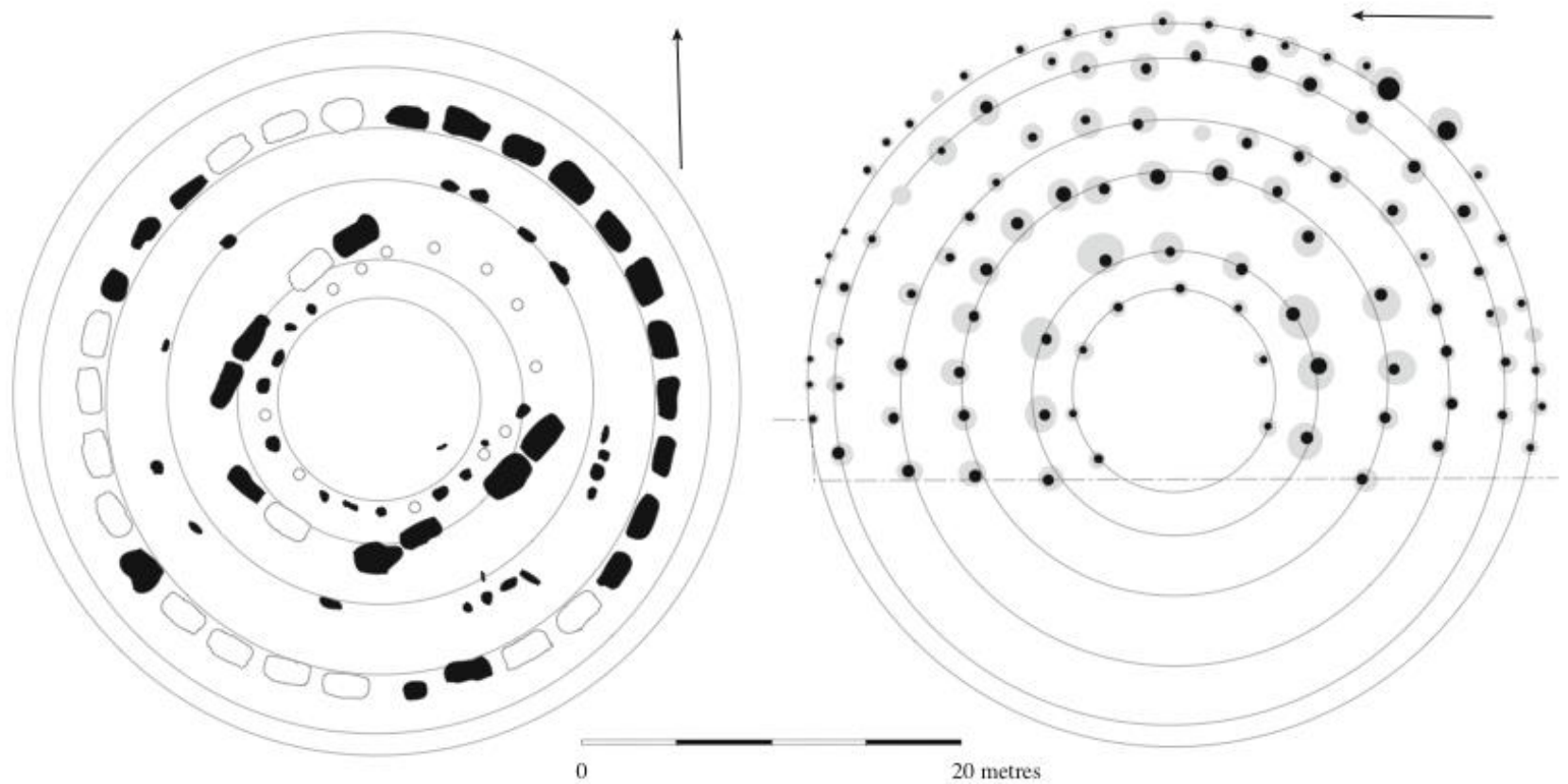
Southern Circle (Phase 1)



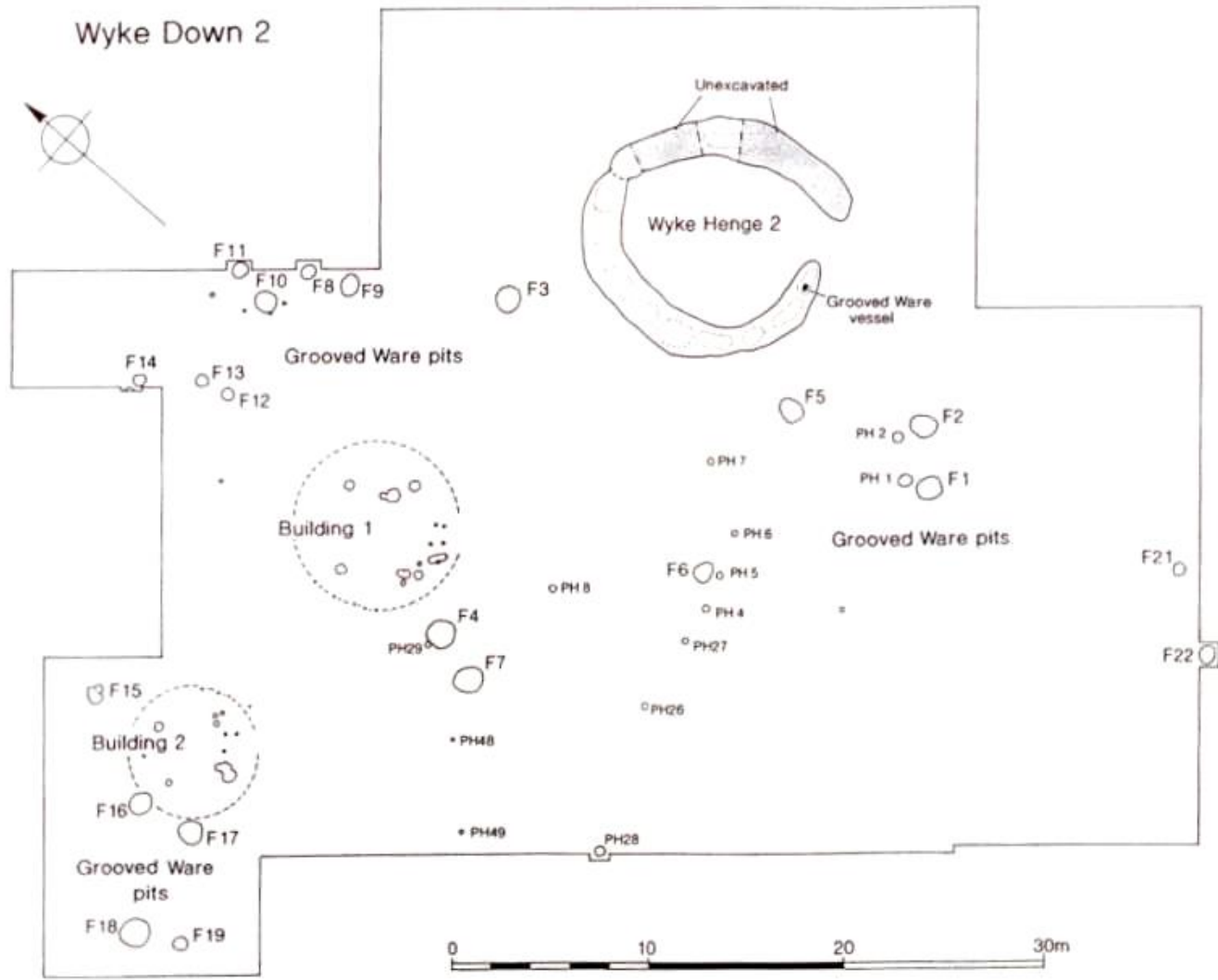
Southern Circle (Phase 2)

0 40 m

The beginnings of the S. Circle and analogous N. Circle – ‘square in circle’ structures. A process of ‘wrapping’



Structural equivalences between Stonehenge III and the Southern Circle and Woodhenge



At Wyke Down on Cranborne Chase, does the henge replace the settlement or are they contemporary? Much the same kind of material deposited in the settlement pits was deposited in the henge ditch, though a predominance of cattle bone in the latter might hint at closer connections to funerary and other rites.

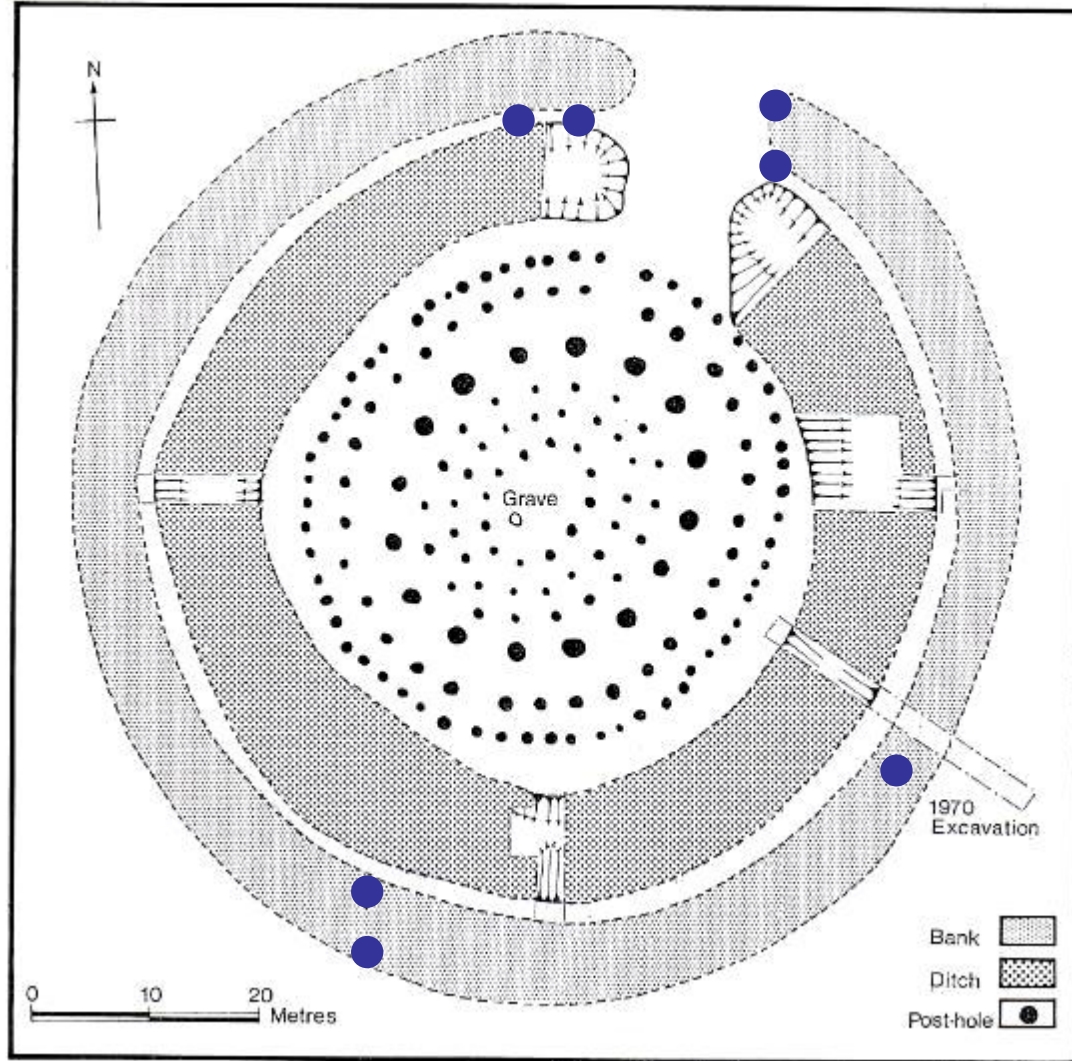
Accumulated sacredness – shifts in ontological status

The timber circles at Woodhenge – enclosed two or three centuries later by the henge earthwork – were preceded by settlement, marked by pits (possible house locations) and refuse spreads under the bank

Here the sequence is from settlement, to timber monument, to henge

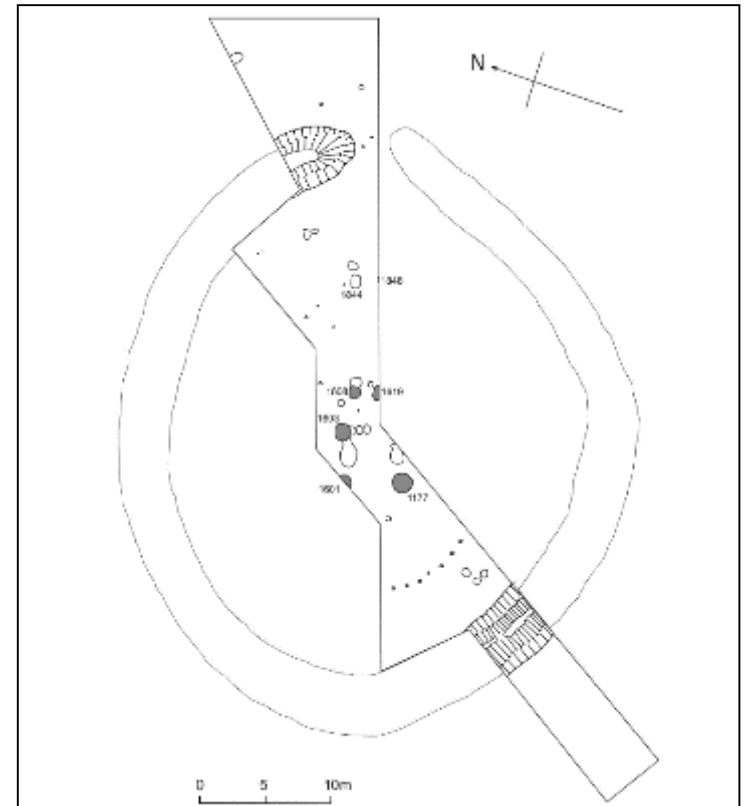
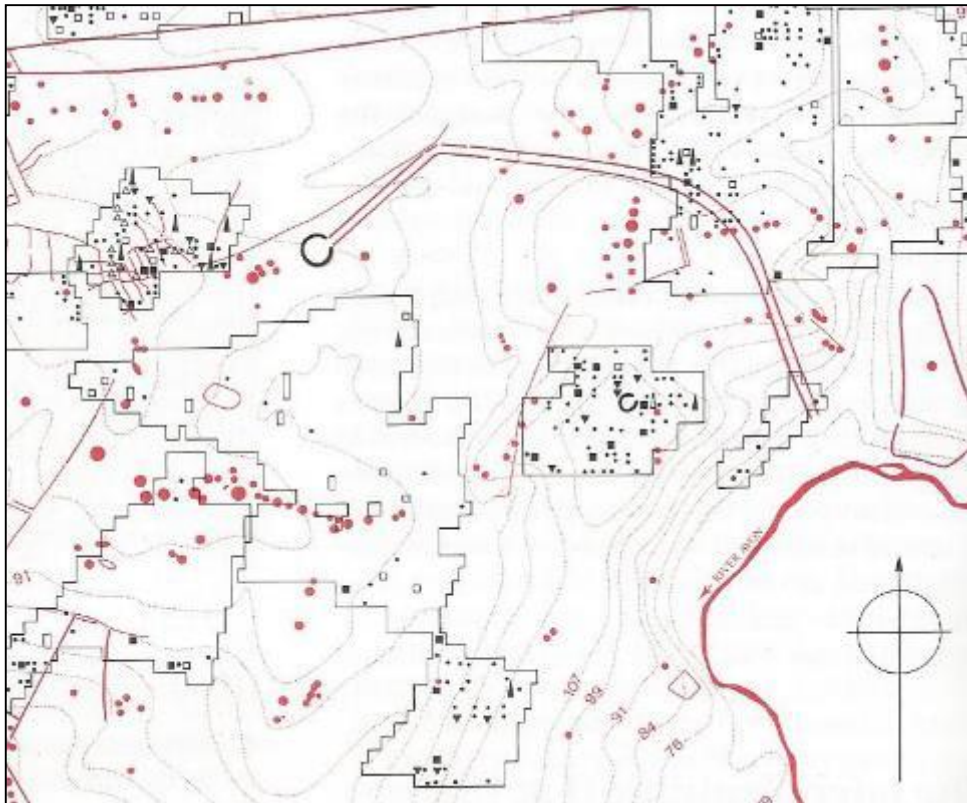
Whatever happened here made this spot special.

WOODHENGE



● Grooved Ware pit

From hall to henge: Coneybury, Wiltshire



Sits within a dense MN-LN scatter. The central features likely pre-date the henge, which was created in the early 3rd millennium BC. Probably a large building set within a fenced area.

In many instances we see the process of 'henging' (enclosing) coming late in the sequence. It's a technology of separation and fixing.



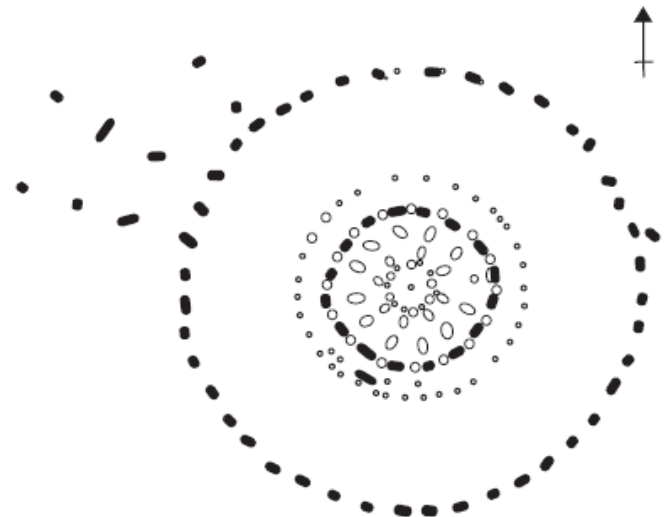
Are we seeing with these structures – whether henges, timber circles, stone circles or mounds - different technologies for controlling and/or presencing sacred power?

These are points and moments where sacred power as inherent in people (their success), the supernatural world, and that of varied material agents came together – where it was harnessed and drawn to push projects forward.

Mana and tapu – a Polynesian analogy

Mana as spiritual energy that can reside in people, animals, places and things.

Mana is linked to *tapu* – a state of extreme and potent sacredness which must be carefully controlled. A contagious sacredness.



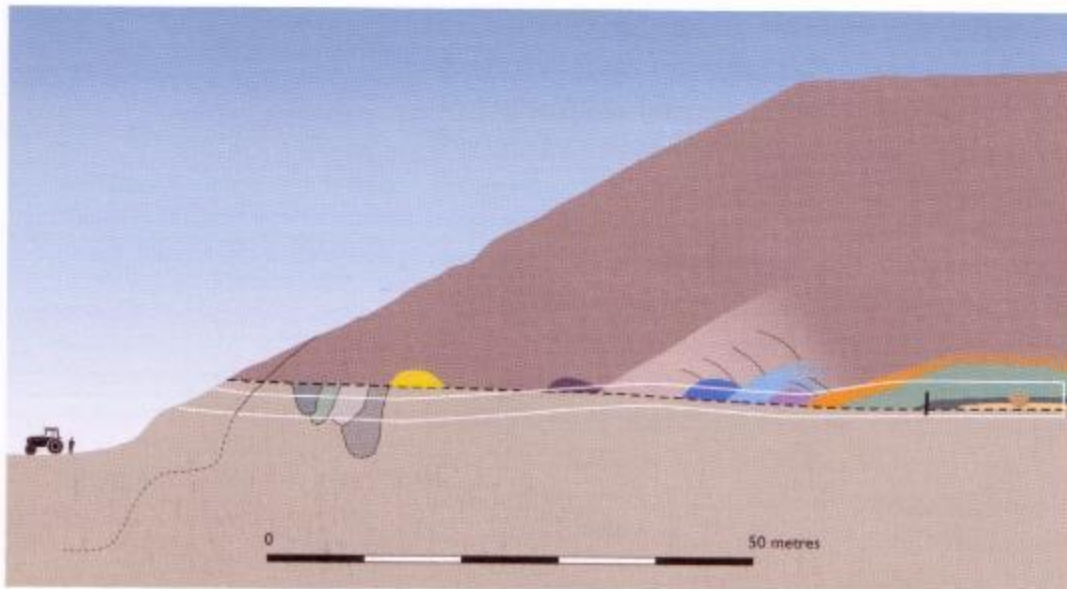


Time and scale

Monument building was part of being Neolithic from its beginnings, but the scale and character changed profoundly around 2500BC.

Earlier accounts (famously Renfrew 1973) have located this up-scaling in models of unilinear social evolution.

But we now know the sequence is punctuated.



The case of Silbury Hill

The largest prehistoric mound in Europe – 120m in diameter, 40m high. Built in several stages over two hundred years or so from 2400BC

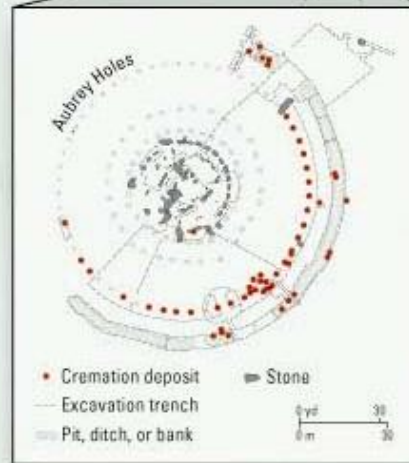
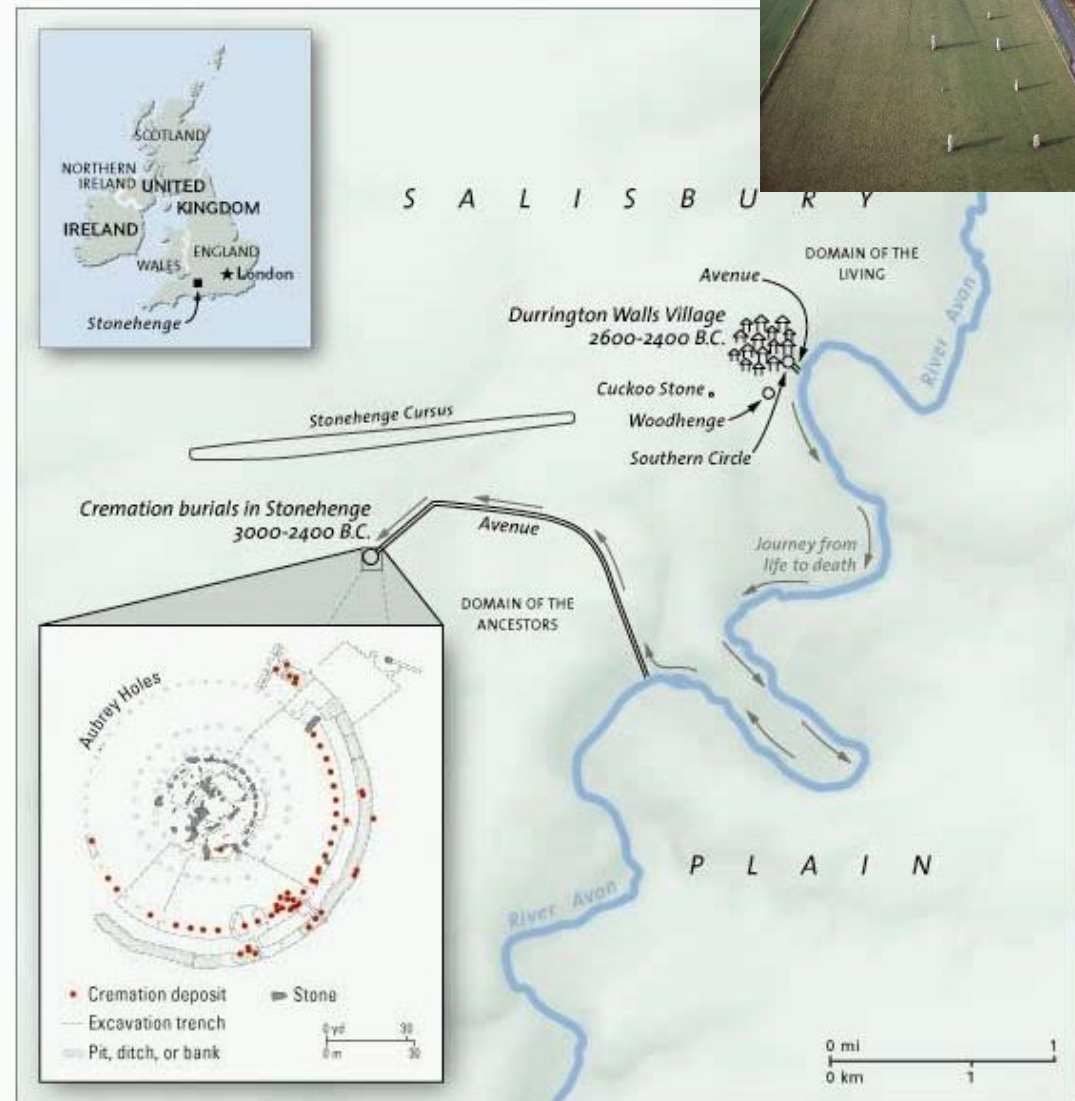
Similar latest Neolithic monumental mounds now confirmed from Marlborough and Marden, within the Wessex region.

Integrated narratives

Not only does the scale of construction ramp up massively around 2500 BC, but in places like Stonehenge and Avebury formerly separate monuments are joined together through the construction of avenues of earth and stone. They become single entities with single narrative qualities.

In the case of Stonehenge, we can see how the complex operates as part of a cult of the ancestors.

What is stimulating this?



The British Isles were culturally insulated during the late Neolithic (3000-2500 BC).

Around 2500/2450 BC we see important changes that are heralded by contacts with Continental Bell Beaker groups.

Initially quite episodic and limited in scale, but the consequences potentially profound. 'Cargo Cult' scenario?

We can see here how the appearance from outside of new values, ideologies, networks and material things brought about change. First, traditional (ancestral) values were reaffirmed and strengthened through monument building and heightened cult activity. With time, those traditional ways were eroded and replaced.

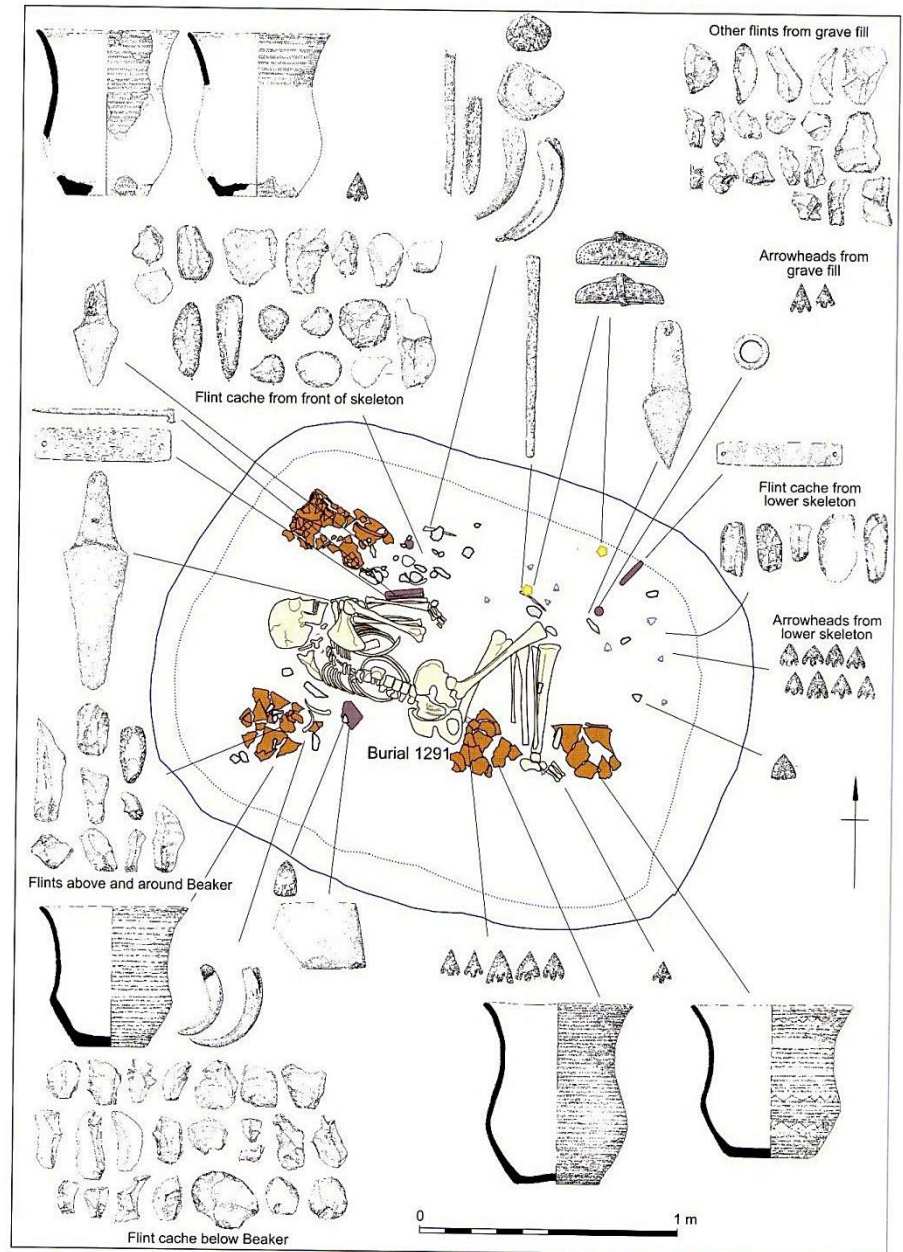
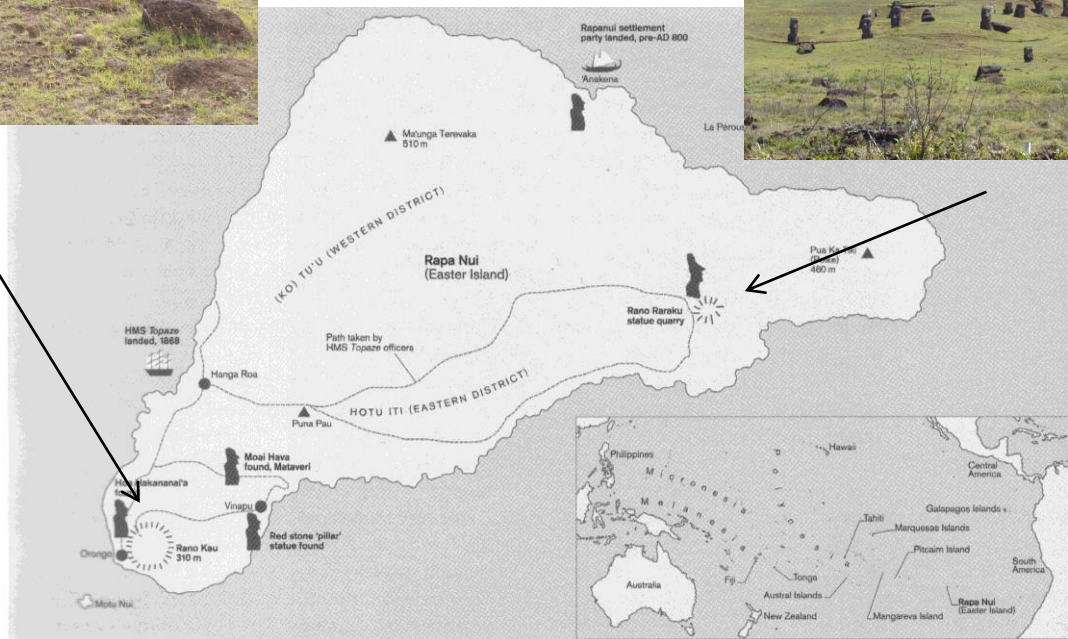


Figure 28 Grave 1289 (Amesbury Archer); distribution of the grave goods

Similar impacts brought about by this kind of asymmetric culture contact are observable elsewhere in the world. Take Rapa Nui, for example. Here, post-contact a new cult emerged that drew in existing beliefs, but focussed on two locations – the statue quarry at Rano Raraku and the Orongo crater. Both were linked in a single cult around leadership performance – the Birdman Cult.



Themes

We have a better understanding that monument building in Wessex and elsewhere in Neolithic Britain was a punctuated process. Certain horizons (e.g. c.3700-3500, 3000 and 2500-2400 BC) mark an up-scaling in activity.

The geographic position of Wessex, its history and landscape may have afforded it a special status.

There existed a close relationship between histories of settlement/occupation and monument creation. The drive to create monuments might arise from a transformation of places brought about by an acquisition of sacredness. That sacredness could emerge from personal power (underpinned by via ancestral connection), natural phenomena, events or processes.

During the later Neolithic, monumental architecture often served to control sacredness and potency. To think of these constructions just as 'temples' or 'shrines' might be to miss a conceptualisation of their power and agency held in their own right.

Culture contact - the impact of Bell Beaker cultural worlds c.2450 BC – was likely the stimulus for an up-scaling in monument building and the creation of Stonehenge 2, Silbury Hill and Avebury's Great Circle and Avenues.



Thank you!