



Newsletter

A Past Participate Summer



We've had a busy first four months for our *Living Amongst the Sarsens* project, followed by a much-appreciated slow down to enjoy the summer holidays.

We've met lots of new lovely people and it's been great to have familiar faces returning. We've now given several guided tours of the Valley of Stones to people who have never been before, despite living nearby and to others from much further afield. We have also provided new insights to people who thought they knew that landscape intimately. The knowledge exchange has also been two-way, we've been learning as well. It's been a real privilege.

This summer we've come to the end of the practical part of our village test pitting project in Somerset with the Quantocks Landscape Partnership. All the artefacts are now clean and the last batch of pottery is with David Dawson the specialist. This was a brilliant project that involved people digging in their own back gardens. We just have the report to write up now as we conclude and summarise all the archaeological research that we have done.

We have also sponsored an event in Devon this summer. A community group put together a super day of events commemorating the Battle of Fenny Bridges, which was part of the Prayer Book rebellion in 1549. There was much to see and do: The Commotion Times provided entertainment in the form of Living History, a coffee morning with additional weapons display caused a stir, Prof Mark Stoyle gave a fascinating talk and the local MP unveiled a new interpretation board about the historic event. All super ways in which people were able to learn about an important historic event that happened in their neighbourhood.

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Using sarsens

The Valley of Stones is the focus of our *Living Amongst the Sarsens* project. The Valley contains a train of at least 1500 naturally located sarsen stones. These stones have been used throughout time, from prehistoric monument builders (think stone circles and long barrows) to as recently as 200 years ago. Katy Whittaker has started to identify evidence for this recent use.

Gullies dug around the larger boulders can be seen, freeing up their sides. Chisel holes can also be

spotted. These are regular holes in the top, that are not quite round, which would have been packed with an explosive charge. The size of these holes is just enough powder to render the stone into pieces, not to blow it into the air, but into pieces that can be more easily moved.

There are also boulders that have been split by chisels and hammers designed specifically for sarsen stone and these can be identified by their straight edges.

“Everyone was super-welcoming, and keen to share their knowledge, and also very kind and encouraging in their teaching - really lovely!”

Fund raising

All of our events are free, however grants will only stretch so far and the more additional funding we can raise the more we can do.

We have a long running ‘Sponsor a sarsen’ appeal. If you are able to donate we will name a sarsen in our survey after you

You can either donate via the website or straight into our account but please tell us so we can ensure we record your donation

www.pastparticipate.co.uk

Sarsen survey

The irregular, rougher stones would probably have been removed and broken up as rubble, to provide hardcore for road building. At least some of the higher quality has been used for street furniture— look closely at the curbs in Abbotsbury next time you’re passing.

As you walk through the Valley of Stones look out for these features, if you find them of particular interest please contemplate coming along to our sarsen survey training. We are going to conduct a systematic survey of all the stones, recording all the evidence of stone working, from prehistory through to the modern day. Once you’ve had the training you can then do the research under your own steam, at a time of your choosing.





Listening to Jim Rylatt talk about the polissoir © Past Participate CIC

Recent PP research results

In June we conducted a geophysical survey near the Grey Mare and Her Colts, a Neolithic long barrow. We couldn't survey the monument itself because it is legally protected (we intend to apply for permission in future) but looked at the area immediately surrounding it. We used a method called magnetometry survey which records tiny changes in the magnetic field of the ground. Things such as ditches that contain re-deposited, burnt or organic material can show up as differing to their surrounding geology.

We discovered a series of small pits in front of the Grey Mare and Her Colts. These are potentially associated with ritual or funerary activities at the long barrow but only excavation could help us date them to the use of the monument.

We also did some resistivity survey— looking at the conductivity of the ground – on Tenants Hill. We found more prehistoric field boundaries, helping to complete the plan of the field system and landscape layout.



Freda and Lucie with the resistivity equipment © Past Participate CIC

Spotlight on a monument

We've been digging a round house on Tenants Hill, but Historic England have also identified several in the Valley of Stones.

It is currently unclear exactly when they were built, we presume sometime in the Bronze or early Iron Age. There are at least 2, possibly four in the Valley Bottom, and some are also visible on the valley sides. Those at the bottom can be identified by a small circle of sarsen, those higher up are visible as platforms. These would probably have had a wooden structure, posts in a circular shape, supporting a thatched or turf roof with wattle and daub walls.

Usually the entrance to these houses would have faced south-east, to capture the best of the sun whilst excluding the southwest wind. Sometimes internal divisions can be identified and there would have been a fire place.

Non Past Participate events of interest

The British Cave Research Association are hosting a free online seminar on **Cannibalism in Upper Palaeolithic Britain: The case of Gough's Cave, Somerset** on **Monday 9 September 2024**.

<https://bcra.org.uk/seminars2024.html>

TAG2024.

Theoretical Archaeology Group 45th Annual Meeting will be held in Bournemouth in December.

They currently have a call for papers— deadline 1st Oct and I'm sure the full programme and further details will be available after then.

<https://tag2024.wordpress.com/>

Upcoming Events

No experience required but booking is essential for all events.
Please book at www.pastparticipate.couk. Or call 07955084661

Guided Walks:

29th September (Valley of Stones).

6th October (To view excavation on Tenants Hill)

Time: 10.00-12.00

Please book via the links on our website:



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Excavation on Tenants Hill

Various dates from 30th Sept– 11 Oct.

Time 10.00– 16.00

There are limited places so please do not book for more than 3 days.

Geophysical and topographic survey on Tenants Hill

Various dates from 4th—11th October (very limited spaces)

Sarsen Survey Workshops

23rd November & January TBC



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The Prayerbook Rebellion



© Jenny Wilson. A photo taken during filming of the TV docu-drama The European Reformation



"Thank you and your colleagues for a splendidly informative evening. I have known the area for 10 years and found it entirely fascinating but yesterday evening you all showed me there was so much more to discover!"

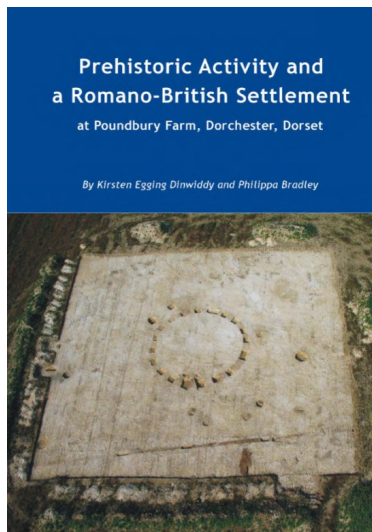
The Battle of Fenny Bridges (1549) was the first time in history that an English King had hired foreign mercenaries to slaughter his own people, and it was a massacre. It is estimated that between 600 and 1000 local men were killed. The battle was part of the Prayer Book rebellion, an uprising in response to an enforced change from Catholic methods of worship to Protestant ones, for the Cornish this centred on the changing of their Prayerbook into English (from Cornish). The city of Exeter was besieged and the Battle of Fenny Bridges marked a turning point. Up until this point the rebellion had the potential to cause significant problems to the government.

In order to commemorate this event a new interpretation board has been erected the battle site, and a local group held a whole day of informative and fun events. Past Participate provided sponsorship for this. One of the reasons we was felt it was appropriate was a connection with our research in Dorset. The 'King's men' were led by Lord Russell, first Earl of Bedford and Lord Privy Seal. It was believed by the Russell family, although some disagree now that it was actually the case, that the family was descended from the ancient family of Kingston Russell in Dorset. Whether or not there was a connection is irrelevant because their belief in it led the Russell Duke's of Bedford to buy Kingston Russell Manor sometime before the 1860s, which will have also included the Stone Circle of the same name!



© David Lanning/ Friends of St Andrews, Feniton

Resources of interest



Wessex Archaeology recently revealed a new free online library containing many of their books and reports. There is much here to browse, why not start with their excavations at Poundbury or the A35 bypass.

<https://wessexarchaeologylibrary.org/>

Oxford Archaeology also have a similar (although less user friendly archive). Try searching for *Given to the Ground' A Viking Age Mass Grave on Ridgeway Hill, Weymouth.*

<https://eprints.oxfordarchaeology.com/>

The **Archaeology Data Service** is a resource where many non-published reports, often from developer funded projects, are deposited.

<https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/>

PAST PARTICIPATE

The Old Rectory House
Marston Magna
Yeovil
Somerset
BA22 8DT

www.pastparticipate.co.uk

E-mail: info@pastparticipate.co.uk

