



A Past Participate Winter



Many people ask me if, as an archaeologist, I have work through the winter!

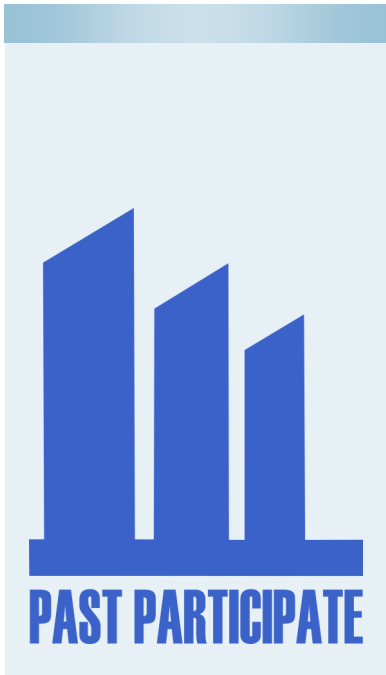
I can confirm that yes we do. Past Participate do try not to excavate when it gets too wet and cold but our sarsen survey in the Valley of Stones is well underway, and is actually best undertaken at this time of year because the grass, nettles and other obstacles to spotting stones tend to be reduced. Our hardy volunteers are busy recording all the stones and will be reporting back over the next few weeks. Due to a rather unpleasant forecast we had to unfortunately cancel our in person workshop and resort to an online format. Despite this we provided them with training to go out under their own steam to record their allocated stones. I wonder if any will be taking along friends and family for Christmas walks with a difference!

Despite the apparent lack of activity we are in fact extremely busy processing data and conducting analysis on all the results gathered during the warmer seasons.

We're also conducting a 25 Sarsens of Christmas on social media– follow our channels to learn about the sarsens of the Valley of Stones and beyond.

Inside this issue

Hedge Bank	2
Round House	2
Shale bracelet	3
Upcoming events	4
Friends of Past Participate	5
Obituary Tim Darvill	6



Hedge Bank

In October we carried out 2 excavations!

Simon Pengelly from Gorwell Farm is the current custodian/landowner of the Grey Mare and Her Colts long barrow. Historic England requested that he move the gateway by the monument in order to prevent damage from vehicles and sheep continually moving over its tail. We helped him dig a new gateway through the hedge bank, closer to the main footpath.

We wanted to excavate here because we thought that the field boundary might originally have been constructed in prehistory, and was part of a wider field system that can still be seen across Tenants Hill and the Valley of Stones. We hoped to find evidence of sarsen clearance underneath, but only found one piece of sarsen stone! Despite this we still think it has prehistoric origins. We found the original ditch used as a quarry for the bank material and some worked flints.

“It was a wonderful experience. Staff and other volunteers, everyone was kind, friendly and positive and it was one of the best experiences I've had, in my life actually!”

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

Round House

We also continued our excavation of the round house on Tenants Hill. In 2019 and 2021 we had dug the majority of a Bronze Age round house and thought we just had a couple of post holes left to excavate. However, on opening up the trench this year we discovered many more postholes and have now concluded we must have multiple buildings. There were distinct trends in the features we found. Some were small postholes with post packing, others were small concave pits. Many of these contained pottery fragments. The next stage in the research is to send the finds to specialists to confirm dates and types. Once these are matched up with the feature types, we hope we will be able to phase the activity that happened in this area.



Volunteers trowelling back, looking for postholes © Past Participate CIC



Left: Excavating the hedge bank. Right: Volunteer Andrew with the piece of sarsen he found

Shale Bracelet

The most exciting artefact we found this year was a shale bracelet. It was within the subsoil above a pit. It was incredibly fragile, and had broken down along its natural laminations but we were able to lift all the pieces together. It is currently with the conservators and in the new year we will be undertaking a fund-raising effort to help pay for this.

The shale bracelet is exciting because Bronze Age shale artefacts are very rare. At present we are unclear as to whether it is early or late Bronze Age, so - we need to get the associated pottery dates back. The older it is, the more unusual. The majority of prehistoric shale bracelets date from the late Bronze Age/Iron Age. An Iron Age manufacturing site was found at Worth Matravers, Purbeck.



Left: Tammy soon after finding the bracelet. Right: The shale bracelet before removal from the ground © Past Participate CIC

Stock enclosure

Some people have suggested that this feature in the Valley of Stones is a stone circle, and you can see why. However, on closer examination the stones actually form a D shape. They are also very close together to be a typical stone circle. Instead, we think it was an animal enclosure. It could form part of the late prehistoric field system, in which case it probably corralled cattle. Alternatively, it may have formed part of a large medieval monastic farm (bercaria) belonging to Cerne Abbey and would have protected sheep overnight.

In addition to the stones there would have been a hedge to provide protection from predators such as wolves. Building platforms cut into the valley side can also be identified nearby, adding to the strength of the argument.



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Non Past Participate events of interest

Making Dorset

On 25th October, I was delighted to be invited to Making Dorset, an exhibition at The Sherborne by one of our volunteers, Sian Evans. As The Sherborne summarise 'Making Dorset explores the intrinsic dialogue between environment, heritage, and creative practice in the county.' This new exhibition, featuring over 30 makers, forms part of the evolving cultural programme at this emerging destination for the arts in Southwest England'.

Sian is a jeweller, who works with hard stone and produces beautiful, wearable pieces. I was delighted to also bump into Amanda Notarianni who is exhibiting her glasswork there – an unexpected Past Participate reunion in delightful surroundings. The exhibition is on until 12th January.

Upcoming Events

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

Guided Walks:

We are not going to be conducting more guided walks until the spring

Sarsen Survey Workshop

11th January.

This event is currently fully booked but do get in touch if you're interested in joining in, I can add you to the waiting list. The number of participants is currently limited because only a proportion of the stones have been logged on our GPS system, and mapping is essential to recording them.

We will be listing new events in the New Year, with geophysical survey, excavation, sarsen survey, guided walks, data and finds processing all lined up for 2025.



Christmas Reading

Two new books have recently been published by our archaeological friends at Past Participate and may be ideal Christmas presents!

Dave Shaw, who many of you have met over the last few years as one of our supervisors has published his second book – Hagan's Tale: Book one of The Sorrowborn. First in a trilogy, this is a fantasy adventure novel with vivid descriptions of the battles and trials of the main characters. His first novel, A Battle Lost, is an exhilarating science-fiction novel that keeps packing the punches until the end.

Joanne Bourne, whom Jim and Anne have excavated with at the Ness of Brodgar (and you might remember from our Long Barrow excavation) has finally gathered together her thoughts on flint, in her book Flint : A Lithic Love Letter. This is her first sole publication, is "her deeply personal love letter to this extraordinary 'biogenic' rock, Bourne traces its geological, architectural and social history and invites us to roam with her in search of it on her beloved North Downs. Fusing science, poetry, history and a profound love of landscape, this is her heartfelt, thoroughly persuasive tribute to the stone she calls 'an art project of the great divine'". A wonderful read for those who enjoy the travelogue genre, combining landscape, materials and

People of Past Participate



The Ditches Excavation 1985. Photo © Steve Trow.

Past Participate is as much about people as archaeology; people in both the past and present. Your experience is highly important to us but sometimes things happen beyond our ability to predict! One such experience came to the fore this autumn.

In 1983 archaeology was my great enthusiasm. I volunteered on "The Ditches" excavation (Iron-Age hillfort/ villa nr Cirencester) where Steve Trow was site director, and his crew were volunteers and Institute of Archaeology graduates. I spent a fabulous three summers at The Ditches. I learned a huge amount, mostly about archaeology, but also about tea-making, air rifles and doughnuts! Forty years later I volunteered on Past Participate's geophysical survey, and then on the Tenants Hill excavation to see whether being on my hand and knees in the mud appealed like it had in 1983.

Who should I meet on my second morning on site, but Steve Trow! Steve and I spent a great couple of tea breaks reminiscing over The Ditches days, and he updated me on the whereabouts and careers of the friends I made in those distant Cotswold trenches".

Catherine
Roberts



Above: That's me in the pale blue Angora bobbly jumper (so 1980s) and hard hat - look at the colours on the infill of the cellar which we are excavating - you could see individual dumped basket-loads as you dug!

Left; This must be late in the excavation as the cellar is nearly empty

Photos © Steve Trow.



Obituary Professor Tim Darvill



As many of you will have heard Prof Tim Darvill passed away in October. As an organisation, and as individuals, we were extremely saddened by this. Tim took a wide perspective of the practice of archaeology, with experience in commercial, academic and community archaeology and had made personal contributions to our own personal archaeological journeys. He was a big supporter of Past Participate; in the early days he supported us through discussion and provided references. More than once he came to visit the site and shared his knowledge and experience with us. We were out excavating at Tenants Hill when we heard how ill he was and we were able to send him a message of support, to which in true form he told us to *'keep up the good work'*, which we fully intend to do.

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