

# FOB NEWS

Friends of Berry Castle Newsletter - Summer 2021



Welcome to our Summer edition. With the green lawns of Wimbledon dominating the television and the colourful flora out in force, at Berry Castle, it certainly feels like Summer has arrived. We're grateful for the positive emails, commenting on how wonderful the site looks, as the Summer colours take hold. If you've not had a chance to visit, recently, you're in for a treat. We'll be hosting a tour of the site, as part of the Festival of Archaeology. More details, later on.

We have an article from Michael Griffith-Jones, focussing on the re-dating of the Huntshaw dagger. And secondly, a look at how technology has changed the way we deal and access archaeology.

## New Dating for the Huntshaw Dagger

Berry Castle is described in the Historic Environment Record (HER) as an Early Iron Age hillslope enclosure, presumably dating to between 600 BC and 500 BC, while Historic England (HE) describes it as a 'slight univallate hillfort', a class of monuments that generally date from the Late Bronze Age to the Early Iron Age. As there is no actual dating evidence, pottery or charcoal (for C14 dating), from the north Devon enclosures these dates must be speculative, but have been widely accepted. It has generally been thought that the Early Iron Age communities who occupied these small enclosures gradually merged into much larger, more powerful groups, abandoning their small enclosures, and going on to build the large hillforts during the Middle Iron Age (300 BC to 100 BC). In the south-west, these hillforts seem to have been abandoned by about 150 BC, with their people returning to small-scale farms, many of which have been identified in south Devon. In west Wales, where dating has been established, the small enclosures similar to Berry Castle and the other Torridge sites, can be dated anywhere from the Early Iron Age to the Late Iron Age and even into the early Roman period. So it is possible that sites like Berry Castle are not early after-all, but may date to the Late Iron Age, after the large hillforts went out of use?

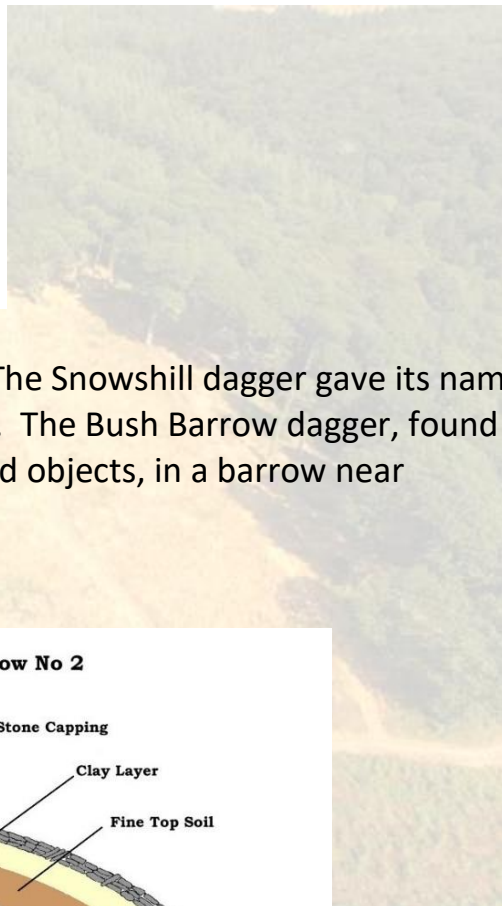
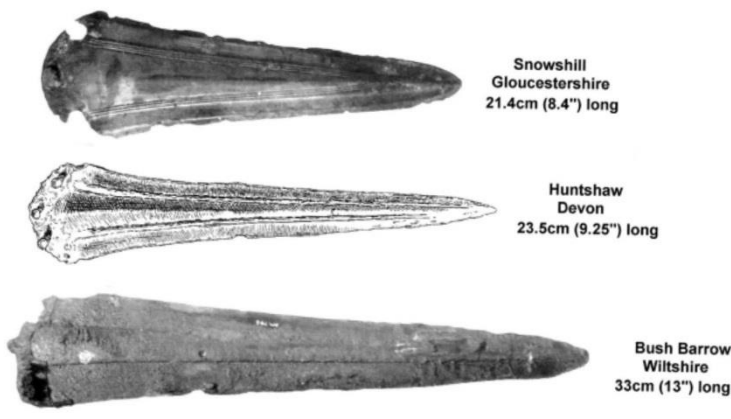
The Middle Bronze Age dates given on our information board were the generally accepted dates for Camerton-Snowhill daggers of which the Huntshaw Dagger is a fine example. They are closely associated with the 'Wessex Culture' and several examples have been found in barrows across Wessex i.e., the Stonehenge area. Most of these excavations were conducted before carbon 14 dating was widely available, so these barrows were broadly thought to be Middle Bronze Age in date, with dates varying over time from 1500 to 1300 BC to 1650 to 1400 BC. These dates are still to be found in some of the literature of these daggers and in some museum exhibits, hence we used them on our info board as they seemed current at the time.

Unbeknown to us at the time, a paper had been published in which a re-assessment of the dating of these daggers in the south-west had been undertaken. It came as quite a surprise that preserved bone and charcoal samples found in the barrow along with the Huntshaw dagger were analysed and the C14 dates obtained were 2032-1887 BC and 1950-1759 BC (calibrated dates BC to 95.4% probability). These dates firmly put these daggers into the Early Bronze Age, not the Middle Bronze Age, with the building of round barrows in the south-west ending in the Middle Bronze Age, about 1500 BC, and not about 1200 BC as previously thought. A well respected south-west archaeologist has said that in all probability Bronze Age dates that were established more than ten years ago are likely to be wrong!

The Huntshaw dagger barrow, Barrow No2 on our map of the Darracott Moor Barrow Cemetery, was excavated by the local Torrington archaeologist George Doe in 1875. He seems to have been a damn good archaeologist by the standards of the day, as his

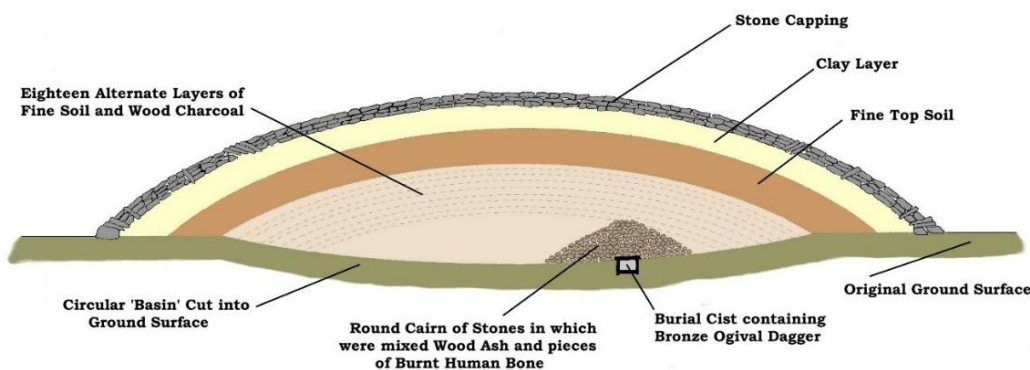
description of the construction of the 'dagger barrow' has allowed us to reconstruct what it may have looked like. Many of his contemporaries were not so thorough. He also preserved at least some of the cremated bone etc. found with the dagger, which has enabled the C14 dates to be obtained, and so helped us to rewrite a little bit of our prehistory. At many other excavations of the time, far more illustrious and well-known 'barrow diggers' merely threw away the cremated bone and charcoal they found, but George Doe didn't. - Bravo George!

**Significant Bronze Age Dagger Finds**



The Huntshaw dagger is up there with the best. The Snowhill dagger gave its name to the general dagger type – Camerton-Snowhill. The Bush Barrow dagger, found together with very rich grave goods, including gold objects, in a barrow near Stonehenge.

**Darracott Moor Bronze-Age Barrow Cemetery - Barrow No 2**



A reconstruction of Barrow No. 2, based on George Doe's excavation record. It is possible that white stones, or at least very pale grey ones were chosen for the barrow's capping, in an attempt to mimic the chalk-covered barrows of the Wessex region around Stonehenge, the possible home of the daggers?



## Huntshaw barrow numbering

The identification 'Huntshaw 2' which appears in archaeological publications and the RAMM exhibit for the dagger was assigned by the late Leslie Grinsell (1907-1995). He spent much of his archaeological career recording and cataloguing prehistoric barrows across many counties of England. In each county he catalogued the barrows by parish, giving each barrow in the parish a number from 1 to xx. He recorded only two barrows in the parish of Huntshaw, therefore Huntshaw 1 & Huntshaw 2. He catalogued the remainder of the barrows in the group as being in the parish of Great Torrington. As he listed the parishes in each county in alphabetical order there is a 'disconnect' between Huntshaw and Great Torrington, for a common group of round barrows. As it is more than likely there were no parish boundaries in the Bronze Age and the barrows are all situated on Darracott Moor, so for the purposes of our map, the barrows are called the Darracott Moor Group. It is based on the 19<sup>th</sup> century map of the barrows that were investigated using its numbering, with a few more recent additions and modifications.



An update on the Darracott Moor Bronze Age Barrow Cemetery, with two more barrows added.

All this goes to show just how dynamic prehistoric archaeology has become, as not only is there doubt about the Early Iron Age date proposed for Berry Castle, but the dating of the Huntshaw dagger has been put back by at least three hundred years, to

a time when it was thought that nothing much was going on in our area. The map of the Darracott Moor Barrow Group on our info board is now also out of date, as at least one, if not two barrows must now be added to the group. With the dating of the dagger the barrow group must now be considered to be of an Early Bronze Age date, with none of them likely to have being built after about 1500 BC.

### A Technical Revolution?

From the early days of hot air balloons, to the latest LIDAR images, aerial pictures have played an important role in understanding the historical landscape. Whether it's surveying a known archaeological area, or finding new ones, by chance. New technology has always assisted archaeologists in uncovering the hidden stories which lie beneath.

How many of us have scoured Google Earth for cropmarks? Or have used the various tools, to show where the Sun, Moon and stars rise and set? There are a vast number of online websites and Apps, which can be found, to assist research into sites. For example, LIDAR (a way of measuring distances by targeting an object with a laser and recording the time for the reflected light to return to the receiver, to make digital 3-D



representations of areas on the earth's surface) has highlighted many undiscovered sites. Websites, such as <https://enfarchsoc.org/opendata> and <https://houseprices.io/lab/lidar/map> vary slightly, offering different tools for LIDAR.

Other websites, such as the Environmental Viewer - <https://maptest.devon.gov.uk/portaldvl/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=82d17ce243be4ab28091ae1f15970924> have a range of base layers and mark historical finds and features, in Devon.

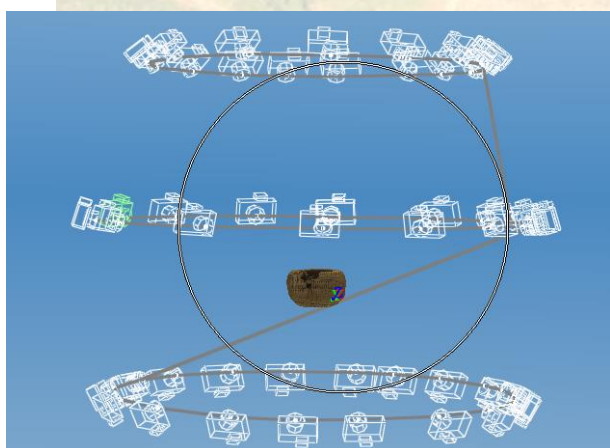
Alongside these, there are numerous 3D landscaping programmes on offer, for a price, such as Ordnance Survey. Although Google Earth has a 3D facility, it doesn't map out the terrain, along the contours, but across the tops of woodlands, which can skew sightlines.

Using several sources is always useful, giving a well-rounded view of the landscape. It's been reported that a significantly higher number of new sites have been found, during lockdown, as so many people have had the time to investigate their local area.

Lockdown has brought about other opportunities, throughout the archaeological world. Online lectures and talks have opened up a whole new approach, engaging many more people, who may not have previously attended, in person. I know from supporters' emails, that this is an element that they'd like to hold onto. Historical groups from around the country can 'attend' other talks and conferences, creating new links and sharing knowledge.

There is also a marked rise in the uptake of online courses and degrees. Again, the opportunities to widen your understanding, is endless. Groups such as Dig Ventures, use the online subscriptions, to fund their digs.

Is technology drawing us away from the physical archaeological dig? No. Technology in the trenches is moving forward, swiftly. Geo-phys techniques have been with us for decades (was it Time Team who brought the term into the general public's vocabulary?!), but the equipment itself, has evolved. As has the methods of recording. A number of digs are now reliant on I-Pads, where photographs, recordings and form-filling can all be completed, in the trench and uploaded to a central unit. Rather than the papier-mache of sodden paper on a clipboard, everything is centralised, instantaneously. The computer can also turn photographs of contexts, into 'drawings', meaning that more time can be spent on the dig, rather than sketching.



Photogrammetry has become an important aspect of recording finds, trenches and landscapes. Using a series of overlapping photographs, which are uploaded to a specific computer programme, a 3D image is generated. The 'lazy Susan' which has

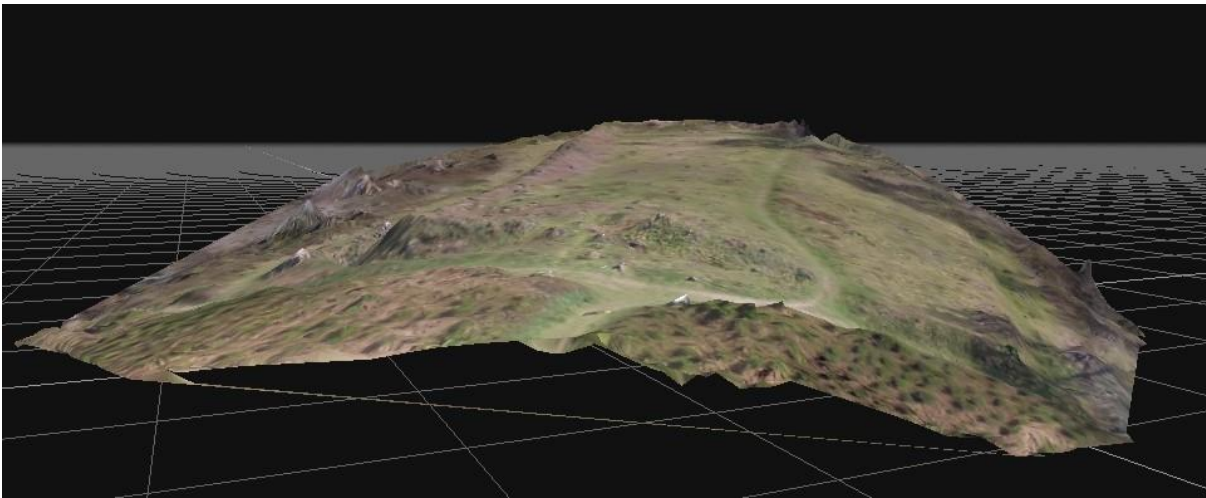
been at the back of the cupboard for years, is a very useful accessory for photographing artefacts! Once the 3D mesh is generated, these models can be rotated and rolled, as if the find is in your hand. This technique has been used for



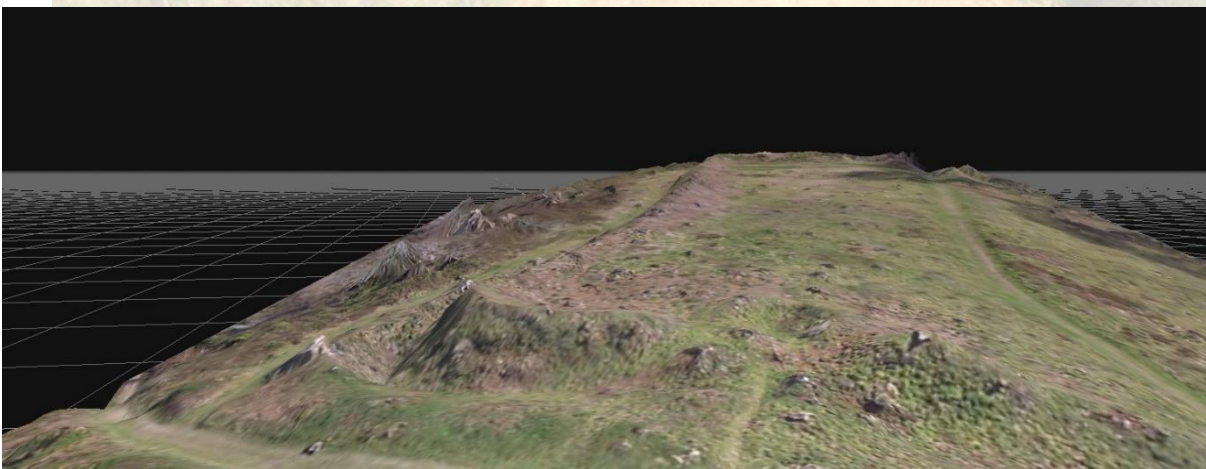


sharing objects, over a distance. Sometimes, to gain an insight from an expert, further afield. Using this approach for trenches can allow people to see inside and examine the sides, without even being on site.

On a larger scale, drones can be used for wider areas, or landscapes. Again, overlapping a series of aerial photographs, brings out every lump and bump, in 3D; not dissimilar to the LIDAR, but on a smaller, closer scale. The 3D tool in Google earth, uses this principle to create the virtual 3D landscape.



Berry Castle from the West



The NW corner

As you can see, the banks and ditches of Berry Castle are clearly defined, from the drone. Amazingly, the model was constructed from only vertical aerial pictures.

All these different approaches to technology are not out of reach for us. They are all easily accessible. Combining the various resources, may lead to a new discovery. A green ring in a field from a ploughed out round barrow, to lines stretching across the landscape from an ancient enclosure or field system. The more people engage with this, the more we can understand the buried history of our area. Maybe you'll be registering a new site, soon?

## Festival of Archaeology

RAMM in Exeter will be running a series of virtual events, during the course of the Festival of Archaeology. Another example of how technology is bringing History to a wider audience.

Here at Berry Castle, we'll be leading two tours of the site. Not virtually, but in person. Can anyone remember what that feels like?!! These will take place on **Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> July**, at **11.00am and 2.00pm**. Each tour will last for an hour and will be led by Michael Griffith-Jones. Although we're not asking for a fee, there will be an opportunity to give a voluntary donation, which goes towards the ongoing site maintenance. As we don't receive any funding, the costs of keeping the site accessible can only be continued through talks and visits.

If you'd like to come along, please let us know at [berrycastle1@outlook.com](mailto:berrycastle1@outlook.com), indicating which time slot you'd prefer, so we have an idea of numbers. Parking arrangements will then be forwarded to you, once we know how many cars to accommodate.

Although many of the Covid restrictions may be lifted, we hope that this won't be affected by any sudden change in rules. We will update you, if adaptations need to be made.

