# Archaeology and the Historic Environment

### An overview of National Trust archaeological practices

**The National Trust exists to conserve for the future places of natural beauty and historic interest, for everyone to enjoy.**
Today, its substantial ownership exceeds 250 000 ha (approx. 618 000 acres) of land, and it holds within its care a range and diversity of archaeological sites and landscapes, unique in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Archaeology aims to understand past generations and how they lived in the land and shaped and altered the places which we know today; it is concerned with the history of almost everything the Trust owns. Historic features survive in every landscape, visible as distinct patterns of land-use in fields, woodland and settlements. Often their prehistoric origins are discernible in their own landscape contexts: at West Penwith in Cornwall, for example, massive dry-stone walls of prehistoric origin have continued in use and are an intrinsic part of today's landscape. The shape and vitality of our countryside owes much to this layered survival, and to the interplay of its cultural complexity and natural diversity. Landscape is always in flux, and is very rarely entirely 'natural'. Rural landscapes, like urban ones, are often in reality 'artificial' – the constantly evolving product of human interaction with the environment. Understanding this interaction is central to archaeology in the Trust and is combined with other significant environmental information to achieve sustainable management of the properties in its care.

The discipline of archaeology encompasses the study of human settlement, industry, agriculture, communications, defence and religion, and even less tangible cultural concerns like class, gender, status and symbolism, aesthetics and spirituality. These are physically preserved in archaeological features from hill-forts to industrial landscapes, from historic townscapes to gardens or field boundaries, from great houses to farm buildings and cottages. All these can be found in the Trust's ownership, and this whole range of cultural elements within the landscape is now commonly referred to as the historic environment.

Archaeology deals not just with the past, but is also about the present day and the future. In seeking to understand and appreciate our past and how people's activities have shaped and contrived the landscapes in which they lived, we can more confidently make decisions about the future of our children's environment and its sustainability. Landscapes are dynamic, and the process of change is central to our concern for the historic environment of our properties.

**The National Trust's ownership – our diverse inheritance**

More than 45 000 archaeological sites are recorded on the National Trust's own Sites and Monuments database, the largest collection in private ownership in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, perhaps in Europe (we anticipate that this figure will double in the future as we complete our surveys of all Trust properties.) They reflect the fine grain of the landscape, ranging in scale and diversity from celebrated sites of national and international importance, such as Hadrian's Wall, Avebury and the Stonehenge landscape to small and locally distinctive features such as milestones and stands for milk churns. The time-span is vast, from the earliest evidence of human activity tens of thousands of years ago, to recent events and processes.

But archaeology in the National Trust is not just about individual sites, monuments and buildings, which have been singled out for their particular historic value and significance. It is about landscapes, about social evolution and the human relationship with nature throughout time. Archaeology is crucial to understanding the remains of prehistoric settlements and their field systems, and to understanding how people lived in past millennia; it is the only evidence we have for a very substantial proportion of human history. Their strategically sited and often architecturally complex hill-forts, used for defence, habitation and status, and their burial mounds used for ritual and social gatherings, are well-known landmarks right across the country.

Roman occupation is well represented on National Trust properties, in military forts and frontiers, such as Hadrian's Wall, and in roads, civil settlements, farms, villas and temples. Chedworth, near Cirencester in Gloucestershire, is the site of an extensive and prestigious Roman dwelling.

Medieval landscape features, such as the remains of characteristic plough marks (ridge and furrow) now in grassland, deer-parks, ancient forests and commons, together with their individual patterns of settlement, often survive well and contribute substantially to an understanding of the landscape we see today. High status medieval buildings such as castles (Bodiam, East Sussex), abbeys (Fountains, Yorkshire), and manor houses (Bradley Manor, Devon) are well known, but the medieval origins of lowlier buildings, particularly farmhouses and cottages, continue to be discovered through survey and analysis.

Sites and structures dating from the last few hundred years have added further to the diverse character of our landscapes, and again represent the whole range of human activities. Among these are the survivals from twentieth-century warfare, most notably Orford Ness, the scene of First and Second World War weapons testing, of developments in the uses of RADAR, and of experimental research by AWRE (Atomic Weapons Research Establishment) in the use of nuclear weapons.

## The role of archaeology in the National Trust

Archaeologists are concerned with recording, interpreting and conserving the historic environment, using their particular skills to 'read' the landscape. This may involve field survey, documentary research, excavation, geophysical survey, building analysis, palaeoenvironmental sampling, landscape characterisation and mapping. Far from being a dry, academic subject, the discipline of archaeology has become an essential and dynamic component of environmental planning and successful conservation.

The Trust has an active archaeological and historic landscape survey programme. New discoveries are continually being made which enlarge our understanding of the historic environments it owns and provide vital information for managers. Apart from being used to guide day-to-day management, surveys also feed into the preparation of statements of significance and conservation plans which will form the long-term vision for Trust properties and will help in their interpretation and presentation.

## Rural landscapes

Historic landscape surveys are planned for all National Trust properties to determine their history and significance. Detailed information is gained through field visits, consultation with county and national archive sources, and the examination of aerial photographs.

Some important sites only survive below ground where they have been buried by natural processes. Many such sites are identifiable from aerial photography, and may contain important structural or organic remains, or artefactual evidence.

During survey, the condition and form of all noted features are recorded and recommendations made for their careful management. Surveys also record the 'ordinary' details of landscape, which might otherwise be taken for granted, and inadvertently lost or disregarded. Survey and research into field banks and walls, for example, at West Penwith, Cornwall, and in the Lake District, have shown that existing fields reflect the shapes of much earlier ones, and the field walls themselves are the 'fossilised' survivals of medieval, sometimes prehistoric enclosures. Features like these could be easily passed over as unimportant and mundane, but they are significant for their local distinctiveness, giving identity and character to a particular locality, and to the people who belong to it. In this way, the National Trust values the richness of everyday elements of the landscape as significant parts of the whole, giving local colour and context to the wider picture.

The historic importance of woodlands, wood pasture and parks is also recorded. Sometimes the woodland cover masks earlier earthwork remains. On the Holnicote Estate, Exmoor, a recent survey within the ancient Horner Wood has revealed the existence of a small medieval settlement, with a number of rectangular building platforms, hollow-ways (sunken ancient tracks), and what appears to be a prehistoric enclosure above, on the moorland edge.

### Vernacular buildings

A complementary survey has also been undertaken to analyse and record the historic fabric of the National Trust's 20,000 or so vernacular buildings. This has revealed a considerable and unsuspected wealth of important small buildings in the National Trust's care. At Lacock in Wiltshire, survey has identified a number of medieval cruck-framed buildings within the village, whilst at Broadclyst on the Killerton estate in Devon, it has confirmed the medieval origins of many apparently much later cottages.

The increased understanding provided by these surveys is essential to guide the conservation management necessary to conserve both the buildings and their landscape contexts. It has also produced an impressive record of the range and variety of styles and materials, of craftsmanship, uses and status in vernacular building, whose implications for research and conservation go far beyond the National Trust.

### Great houses and mansions

Programmes of survey and analysis also help to inform the understanding and management of our major historic buildings, many of which may appear to be later, but which have at their heart the traces of an earlier, medieval house. Some medieval monastic buildings in National Trust ownership survive in this way. At Lacock in Wiltshire, a fine Renaissance house with later additions incorporates wonderful, surviving medieval cloisters. At Mottisfont Abbey in Hampshire, the monastic church was converted into the existing house after the Dissolution of the Monasteries, and at Buckland Abbey in Devon, the same thing occurred, ensuring the survival of parts of the medieval buildings.

Structural alterations and repairs to historic houses on Trust properties are normally accompanied by archaeological investigation, recording and analysis. The archaeologist and the architect work closely together to gain maximum information about the house's historic fabric and to ensure that necessary works are carried out as sensitively as possible.

### Industrial landscapes

The National Trust has a distinguished record of concern for our industrial heritage, and is keen to protect the context and infrastructure of its varied industrial landscapes. These include specific sites ranging in scale from the smaller examples such as Paterson's Spade Mill in Northern Ireland and Finch's Foundry in Devon, to the impressive complex at Quarry Bank Mill, Styal, Cheshire and extensive, major, industrial landscapes. Notable among these is the St Just mining landscape in Cornwall, now part of the Cornwall and West Devon Mining Landscape World Heritage Site. This area contains the evocative structures of Cornish metal-ore mining, and the numerous Cornish engine houses, icons of the Cornish landscape.

Surveys on National Trust properties have identified the evidence of industry in all its forms: extractive industry, manufacturing, marketing, trade and commerce, communications, roads, canals and bridges. It includes airfields and telecommunications, the houses, churches, chapels and social clubs of industrial

communities, farming and fishing, coastal protection and defence. Such sites contribute powerfully to the character and meaning of many National Trust properties, some of which reflect the power and influence of industrialists, whose houses and estates were dependent on the wealth of industry. Penrhyn Castle in Gwynedd would not have existed without the Welsh slate industry, while Knightshayes in Devon was built in just the right position for its owner to enjoy the fine views down to his distant cloth mill in Tiverton.

A survey of country-house technology in the ownership of the National Trust is currently under way. Its initial results have revealed that the Trust is the owner of some of the most important examples of early technology, including electrical and acetylene lighting, heating, internal transport and communications systems, water provision and sewage disposal.

The growing public concern for our national industrial heritage, past, present and future, has spurred the National Trust to consider its own position and re-examine its role in this field. It will also consider enhanced presentation of these landscapes to provide opportunities for interest and study. These will focus on stimulating people's imagination towards a better appreciation of the importance of the industrial heritage in the economic and cultural life of the nation.

**Coastal landscapes**
The coastlines of England, Wales and Northern Ireland have been ploughed, grazed, quarried, mined, visited, settled on, fished off and sailed from for thousands of years.  Evidence for the close human relationship between land and sea can be found throughout the Trust's 1100 km (700 miles) of coastal ownership. The coastal heritage, too, is being surveyed and recorded. Its variety is immense, and embraces extended historic landscapes, such as the shrunken medieval port of Winchelsea in East Sussex and the alum works on the Ravenscar cliffs in North Yorkshire. It also includes a multitude of other surviving elements of former industry (including salt pans and pilchard sheds), communications systems (such as lighthouses and radio systems), ships and shipwrecks, defence and settlement.

Our coastline is constantly evolving, shaped by the processes of erosion and accretion. But these same processes also lead to its loss, and with it, certain elements of our coastal heritage. Climate change is likely to accelerate these processes still further. In consultation with other national organisations, the Trust has drawn up a list of properties where varying levels of erosion and flooding could be expected within a reasonable timescale.  We are now working with property managers and advisers to identify assets (including archaeological remains), to determine the issues and measures we will have to take in order to manage the risk of erosion and flooding in the future.

**Designed landscapes – parks and gardens**
Field archaeology is increasingly used by researchers and managers of historic parks and gardens to contribute to an understanding of the cultural significance of the place and to its conservation. Understanding of physical changes to a garden's design, layout and uses can be gained through survey and excavation,

research and analysis. Archaeological results complement the work of the garden historian and often illustrate or enhance the detail of historic written records, maps and plans.

Methods used include the study of aerial photographs as well as topographical and geophysical surveys to record subtle surface or below-ground features. Excavation, used cautiously, will provide detail of the fabric and construction of features such as paths, the sites of monuments, statues or other architectural elements, including the layout of beds. Under certain conditions, soil analysis can also provide detailed evidence of vegetation and the history of planting through seed and pollen remains. Above ground, archaeological analysis can further our understanding of the development and use of garden buildings and their conservation.

On a wider canvas, the archaeologist is interested in studying the landscape and cultural setting of the historic garden, its relationship to a family, house, settlement or community, its status and symbolism. All these elements contribute to the assessment of what is significant about the garden and help to guide conservation policies and strategies.

Archaeological research and analysis has enormous potential when developing proposals for restoration of an historic garden, and has been used most effectively at, for example, Biddulph Grange in Staffordshire, where features of the historic garden were revealed by excavation during its restoration. Large-scale conservation projects within designed landscapes at Stowe in Buckinghamshire, Prior Park, Bath and at Croome Park in Worcestershire have also benefited from accompanying archaeological research and survey. Archaeological survey at Studley Royal and Fountains Abbey has contributed to the formation of the World Heritage Site management plan.

**The National Trust's sites & monuments record (SMR)**

The National Trust has developed a central database to manage its own unique archaeological record. Originally derived from Ordnance Survey catalogue cards, the SMR identifies each site, recording its description and location, statutory and non-statutory designations, condition and monitoring records, related sources and site-specific management recommendations. The database has already become an essential tool to guide management and two important components give context to the text-based records. The first is an image library which allows digitised photographs, images, plans and other documents to be linked to individual records. The second component is a Geographical Information System (GIS) which allows spatial data, such as surveyed features, to be linked to records. We are currently exploring exciting ways in which other datasets, such as geology, topography, soils, or survey data such as geophysics and lidar, may be combined in the GIS to map, query and display our historic environment.

Although the SMR is essentially a stand-alone database, we are looking at ways in which the text-based and spatial records may be integrated with the Trust's other datasets, especially the Property System. Such integration would allow all staff, with an interest in managing properties, to see the physical extent and

nature of the archaeology, and help ensure that the remains of the past are fully recognised and integrated in the Trust's activities.

**Conservation and sustainability, promotion and access**
The Trust provides benefit to the nation from its properties, principally by encouraging public access over its land. Much of the open countryside – mountain, moor, down and heath – owned by the Trust is available for public access. But our historic environment is fragile, and this can lead to potential conflict of interests where heavily visited properties contain vulnerable archaeological elements. Over-use of a footpath which crosses the rampart of an Iron Age hill-fort will result in erosion and likely loss of archaeological evidence from the buried ground surface beneath the bank. This might include evidence for farming, vegetation and woodland cover contained in traces of seeds, pollen and animal remains, trapped during the building process.

To minimise loss of material and potential knowledge through damage, the historic environment must be cared for – conserved and managed in such a way that access is maintained, but our responsibility of care is answered.

Some modern agricultural processes, such as deep ploughing, moling and the heavy use of chemicals, are a potential source of damage to structural remains or artefacts below the ground, as has recently been demonstrated nationally by the English Heritage Monuments at Risk Survey (1998). Wherever possible at Trust properties, measures are taken to avoid or mitigate threats to the archaeological survival. This may simply involve organised field walking and finds retrieval, or sometimes, in the longer term, special provision for alternative agricultural practices, such as arable reversion, with funding support from agri-environmental grant schemes.

The Trust's archaeologists contribute with other National Trust advisers and managers to the formation of Whole Farm Plans and proposals for diversification on certain National Trust farm tenancies. Sympathetic treatment of redundant vernacular farm buildings is a particular concern.

**Management of the historic environment**
To advise on the best management of its archaeological resource, the National Trust has a team of centrally based advisers and a number of regional archaeologists who form part of the regional management teams. These all contribute towards discrete property or site-based needs. On a wider scale they work to create regional strategies and national policies, through consultation with regional management staff, statutory agencies and other organisations at local, regional and national level. Where a large project calls for dedicated but temporary archaeological involvement, a consultant archaeologist is employed on contract for the term of the project.

But good management is always a balancing act, and nothing exists in isolation. What is beneficial for the archaeology of a site or property may be damaging to other Trust interests. It is essential to be aware of potential conflicts and to try to

resolve these at an early stage, if necessary through mitigation, as part of the process of good professional practice.

An important part of the archaeologist's work in the Trust is to generate and pursue partnerships and build good relationships with other professional bodies. This is inevitable in dealing with the management of some properties where powerful designations highlight their international or national significance. Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal in Yorkshire, Stonehenge and Avebury in Wiltshire, Hadrian's Wall in Northumbria, and the St Just mining landscape are all World Heritage Sites designated by UNESCO for their universal cultural value, and their management is achieved through consultation and partnership. At Stonehenge, the Trust is working closely with English Heritage and the Highways Agency to find solutions to the outstanding problems of visitor management, highways and land-use. Sites which are in Guardianship or which are Scheduled Monuments will inevitably involve consultation with English Heritage, CADW or the Environment & Heritage Service (Northern Ireland). Partnership projects enable funding for research and survey, which will benefit all contributors. These include an archaeological assessment of the medieval town of Winchelsea in Sussex, the historic survey and analysis of the Malvern Hills AONB on the border of Worcestershire and Herefordshire, and specialist surveys of industrial sites in the Lake District.

The National Trust's Archaeology Panel is another valued means of delivering advice on archaeology and the historic environment. The Panel is composed of senior members of the profession, all of whom voluntarily offer their time and skilled advice, providing strong support in the resolution of issues, the formation of policy and the exercise of debate.

**Volunteers for archaeology**

People enjoy archaeology, and the National Trust is fortunate in its long tradition of working with volunteer enthusiasts. Excavation, survey, geophysics and documentary research; repair, consolidation and monitoring of archaeological features; building recording, graveyard surveys, earthwork repair; aerial photography by qualified pilots; underwater recording by licensed divers; these are just some of the archaeological projects which have been undertaken or supported by National Trust volunteers. Some projects, like that at Corfe Castle in Dorset, organised through the Working Holidays Scheme, have taken place seasonally over a number of years, and have generated close friendships and deep associations with the National Trust. For some young people this direct experience has encouraged them to choose a career in archaeology and conservation.

The Trust also works closely with certain universities, providing placements for students who desire practical involvement in a major conservation organisation as part of their career development and university degree qualification.

**Increased awareness – education and interpretation**
The Trust is keen to promote certain of its archaeological sites and landscapes for their educational value, and the National Curriculum provides a framework for this use within schools, and through group visits to National Trust properties. For adults, there is the opportunity for research projects generated through the Trust's relationship with universities and long-term volunteer schemes, and for more general educational experience gained through Working Holiday Archaeology projects or student placements with Trust staff.

The Trust places great emphasis on providing better intellectual access to its properties for the public. On a small scale this is being answered for the historic environment by the provision of published leaflets and guidebooks to interpret the archaeological and historical aspects of a property, as on the Kingston Lacy Estate in Dorset. At Avebury, Stonehenge and at the new East Anglian property of Sutton Hoo, visionary projects of considerable size and complexity are under way, which will enhance the visitor's understanding and enjoyment of these landscapes through a number of different and carefully constructed media. A number of properties celebrate National Archaeology Week each July by providing events for families which promote and share the enjoyment that archaeology can bring.

**Dealing with change – are we sustainable?**
The Trust promotes the study of continuity of use, and change in the landscape, to provide historical models for the present and for future users of the countryside. Change is inevitable, and archaeology is, in part, about understanding that process. We aim to manage this change to promote the continuity of maximum diversity of the great range of features of historic value on all our properties as part of the living landscape, whether they are internationally recognised monuments or small areas of the historic environment in all its variety.

Climate change and coastal processes, environmental and agricultural change, and changes within rural communities are already deeply influencing the way in which the Trust is thinking about its management. The way in which these changes will affect or will be affected by the constraints of the historic environment must remain a vital part of the debate.

Text by Caroline Thackray
Archaeological Adviser
Estates Department
The National Trust, 2001

Revised by Guy Salkeld
Archaeologist (Research and Technical)
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