



Spring 2025

Welcome to our new format Past Participate newsletter.

We've just returned from our summer excavation of the brickworks in the Valley of Stones and are feeling very pleased with the results, albeit a little bit frazzled after experiencing some extreme weather. From the relentless heat and sun to the rain, fog and mist, our excavations on Dorset hills continue to keep us on our toes! You can read more about the archaeology we found below, in addition to updates on our work, upcoming activities you can get involved in, and other events that may be of interest to you.

Excavations at the Brickworks

We had a very successful 2025 excavation season. We excavated the site of a brick kiln and possible clay working area in the Valley of Stones National Nature Reserve. It was probably built by the Bridehead Estate (as it is on their land) and used to make bricks for the farm buildings on the estate. We did not find a date for its initial construction, but it was likely to have been in use at several points during the 18th and 19th Centuries. We do have part of a clay pipe bowl that we can date to 1820-1840 found in the upper level of the kiln trench, meaning that is probably the last date of activity at the site (what we would call a terminus post quem). The pits where the clay was extracted are still visible as ponds, and there are many other traces in the immediate landscape related to the wider brick works. We're currently writing up the report and teasing out the details. More information will be available once this is complete.



Volunteers excavating the brick kiln- note the colour of the soil! © Past Participate



Photo of Heidi and volunteers looking at the possible standing stone
© Past Participate

Possible Standing Stone

During the excavation we also identified a possible standing stone. We think it has the potential to have been a prehistoric standing stone (dating to the Neolithic – early Bronze Age) based upon its location and its comparative isolation from any other sarsen stones. While the trench we opened was small it was quite complicated, and again more details will follow when our post-excavation assessment is complete.

Valley of Stones Self-Guided Walk – can you help?

We are delighted to announce that we have been awarded funding from the Community Access Fund, Dorset National Landscape, to contribute to our National Heritage Lottery Fund grant to develop a self-guided tour of the Valley of Stones. Accompanying this will be some online digital 'hints' to encourage people to visit the Valley of Stones and once there, to get the maximum enjoyment from their visit. If you have noticed any barriers or issues that you think potential visitors might find useful to be made aware of, please drop Hayley an email. We've already noted the restricted parking spots, but if there is anything else you have encountered on your visits such as steep slopes, regularly muddy paths or other obstacles, we would be very grateful to hear them. We will be working with an artist and graphic designer to help produce a high-quality leaflet, and once it is designed, we will be looking to recruit volunteers to test it out!



Photo of the Valley of Stones © Heidi Archer/ Past Participate

Past Participate Merchandise and fundraising

T-shirts and other merchandise are now available to purchase from our website. There are fabulous images of some of our best finds, such as a hand axe, leaf-shaped arrowhead and shale bracelet, if you want to show how proud you are to be in Team PP! They are all reasonably priced and initial feedback on the quality of the products has been very positive. As a social enterprise company, any small profits from these sales are reinvested in delivering our free-at-the-point-of-access activities, such as excavation, survey, workshops and lectures.

We are committed to the quality of our research-led activities and contributing to new knowledge about the archaeology local to west Dorset, but these all attract costs. Our latest invoice for excavation toilets was just over £400 and our unexpected on-site theft of small items will cost about £120 to replace. Donations are always welcome, or you can still sponsor a sarsen! We raised over £500 through the donations made through events booking in April and May and we're really grateful for these. We also experienced a reduced booking cancellation rate. Thank you.



www.pastparticipate.co.uk/shop

Past Participate Updates

It has been a busy year for us! In addition to our work in Dorset, we continue to contribute in different ways to wider archaeological practices and research development in the UK. As part of International Women's Day in March, Anne organised a day of speakers at the Dorford Centre, Dorchester. It was a fantastic day full of high-quality speakers including the author and Vice Chair of the Dorset Natural History and Archaeology Society, Tracy Chevalier. Anne has been active in promoting equality and diversity in archaeology since 2008, working with Rachel Pope at the University of Liverpool.

In May, Anne also co-organised an international conference in flint mining and extraction in Worthing. Just north of Worthing are four early Neolithic flint mines, active from c. 4000BC which represent some of the very earliest Neolithic activity in Britain. With attendees from over nine countries, including the USA, Spain and Poland, there were two days of academic papers and a trip to visit Grime's Graves in Norfolk. We are grateful to Worthing Museum and Art Gallery for their support, in addition to colleagues at English Heritage. An open access edited volume of papers will be published in 2027.

In other news, Jim has recently left Past Participate to focus on his other professional projects. It was not an easy decision for him to make, and he's very proud to have been such an integral part of the formation, growth and development of our company over the last seven years. He has been a valuable asset to all aspects of our archaeological work over this time, and we're sure you'll join us in wishing him all the best for the future. One of his many skills was his diligent focus to copy-editing our newsletters, and we hope that you don't spot many more errors now!



Quantocks Test Pitting and Storytelling

You may remember reading about (or even participated in) the Village Test Pitting Project that we led for the Quantocks Landscape Partnership Scheme (QLPS) between 2021-2024? Following support from Dan Broadbent, the Historic Heritage officer for the QLPS, and Past Participate, the Quantocks Heritage Group has been newly formed by the archaeological volunteers. We are delighted to have provided some additional training and support for them, and their first project is the North Petherton Test Pitting programme, taking place during the Festival of Archaeology this month (see <https://www.qhg.org.uk> for more details).

We are very pleased that Dan Broadbent has been nominated for Community Archaeologist of the Year (Marsh Community Archaeology Awards). He has led inclusive archaeology projects which have 'opened doors for people who never imagined they could take part in archaeology'. We enjoyed working with Dan and think he fully deserves this recognition. When he's not doing archaeology Dan has another string to his bow in delivering Storytelling. He performs across the south west and was most recently at the Semley music festival.

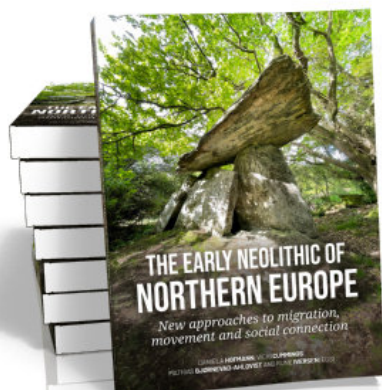
[Blabbermouth Community Storytelling](#) | [Sharing stories to strengthen communities](#) | South West England, UK

Publications of interest

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Bournemouth University have recently published new research into human skeletons found at Maiden Castle. Radio carbon dates have demonstrated that although some did suffer a violent death this was not during clashes with Roman invaders, but probably occurred across multiple generations preceding this time. The article is open access and can be read here

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ojoa.12324>



A new, open access, book has been published: *The Early Neolithic of Northern Europe*. New approaches to migration, movement and social connection. It is edited by Daniela Hofmann, Vicki Cummings, Mathias Bjørneved-Ahlqvist & Rune Iversen and contains Anne's article on Neolithic flint mining.

[The Early Neolithic of northern Europe](#)

Archaeological events that may be of interest

We are taking part in Dorset History Centre's Archaeology at the archives on 19th July and will be at Portland Museum at the end of July (dates to be confirmed).

There are lots of events coming up as part of the CBA's Festival of Archaeology which runs from the 19th July -3rd August. We've listed those that we think are most relevant to our research and community but do have a look at what else is on <https://www.archaeologyuk.org/festival.html>

Bridport Museum

Until the 2nd August you can view a temporary exhibition at Bridport Museum. Archaeology Then and Now: Unearthing Waddon Hill.

<https://www.bridportmuseum.co.uk/whats-on/view/?v=archaeology-exhibition-waddon-hill>

19th July

Archaeology at the archives

<https://www.archaeologyuk.org/festival/festival-event-listing/archaeology-at-the-archives.html>

"Meet the archaeologists at the Dorset History Centre. A chance to find out about archaeology in Dorset including archaeological records from the Dorset Archives, finds and displays from recent excavations, aerial photos. Meet volunteer groups including Past Participate and Dig the Street from Weymouth. Join in activities for families such as badgemaking, handling real archaeological objects, flint knapping demonstrations and more. Some activities will be at specific times and for limited numbers - more information to follow".

19th July

Walking in the Footsteps of our Ancestors - Free Guided Walk in the landscape around Hardy's monument

<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/dorset/hardy-monument/events/431a7f64-c18e-4173-8f5e-d01a17835617>

"Starting and finishing at the Monument, we will follow a route which takes in fantastic views of the Ridgeway, Jurassic Coast, valleys, chalk downland, and farms. We will study the barrows on the landscape as well as identifying the more recent industrial archaeology that can be found in the hills we walk through".

19th July

Tour of Down Farm and the Dorset Cursus

<https://cranbornechase.org.uk/events/tour-of-down-farm-the-dorset-cursus/>

"Discover the longest Neolithic Monument in the UK in a tour led by farmer and archaeologist Martin Green. The Dorset Cursus is the longest Neolithic Monument in the UK, this is a unique opportunity to see how it lies across the rolling landscapes of Cranborne Chase National Landscape, as part of the Dorset Festival of Archaeology".

22nd July

Champions of the Past: Lasers and landscapes

<https://cranbornechase.org.uk/events/champions-of-the-past-lasers-and-landscapes-webinar/>

"Champions of the Past was a major archaeological project that aimed to raise awareness and inspire new volunteers by identifying and exploring archaeological sites and features in this historically rich National Landscape. The project was part of the five-year Chase & Chalke Landscape Partnership Scheme, supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

Rebecca will share some of the incredible outcomes and discoveries for the project and will unveil

exciting plans for its future as it is rolled out across the entire National Landscape, as a lasting legacy to the Chase & Chalke project."

24th July

Fraught with high tragedy: new insights on the Maiden Castle Iron Age 'War Cemetery': A talk from Martin Smith

<https://www.dorsetmuseum.org/whats-on/fraught-with-high-tragedy-new-insights-on-the-maiden-castle-iron-age-war-cemetery-dr-martin-smith/>

"This public talk presents new work by archaeologists from Bournemouth University, that has used radiocarbon dating to arrive at new conclusions regarding the dead of Maiden Castle and why they were laid to rest within the ramparts of this iconic site".

26th July

Barrows to Bunkers - a free guided walk through 4000 years of Hive Beach's history

<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/dorset/hive-beach/events/9bfc92da-0051-4224-806d-3069cfe82ba7>

"Our National Trust archaeology volunteers will show you important landmarks linked to WW2 but will also discuss Bind Barrow and other significant points of interest which can be seen from this key viewing point. We hope to cover around 4000 years of history at Hive Beach in just under 90 minutes!"

26th and 27th July

A performance of poetry and writings by Thomas Hardy to celebrate the archaeology found at his home, Max Gate.

<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/dorset/hardys-house-max-gate/events/7d7d7366-2857-4e43-a23b-fcad3a6ba385>

Until autumn 2025

The Forgotten Women of Dorset's Past - Talk by Amber Manning.

<https://www.greenacre.info/WTM/page24.html>

Dorset History Walks

13th August

A Barrowload of Barrows

A circular walk looking at the barrows and barrow cemeteries on the ridge above the village of Littlebredy.

<https://www.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/w/archaeological-events-list>

Hope to hear from you soon

As always we love hearing from you. If you have any comments or questions about this newsletter, about the Valley of Stones or anything else archaeological please get in touch.



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