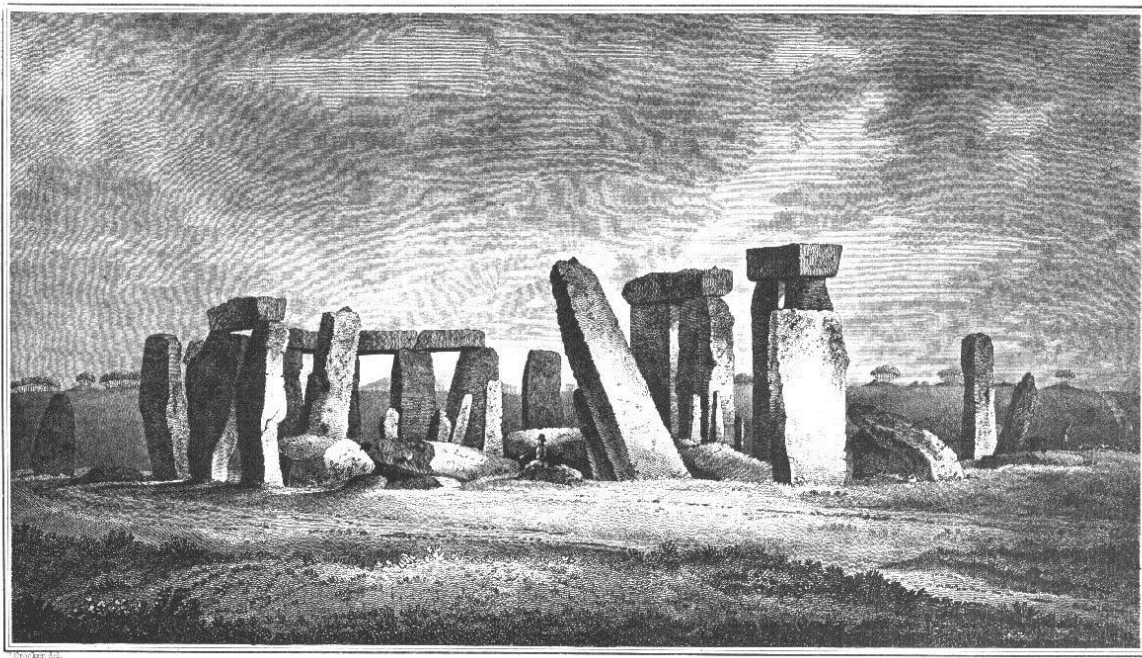

'We speak from facts not theories': breaking new ground in 1812. In celebration of the bicentenary of the publication *The Ancient History of Wiltshire* by Richard Colt Hoare.

By Angie Wickenden



WEST VIEW OF STONEHENGE.

Published for W. Miller, Abchurch Lane, London, Jan'y 1842.

‘Archaeology is a signifying practice, expressive and transformative. The past is written. Past and present are mediated in the archaeological text’. Shanks and Tilley, 1987, p 213.

In 1798, William Cunnington began to dig barrows in Wiltshire and in April 1801, went on to meet Richard Colt Hoare who joined and subsequently financed the campaign of digging barrows and surveying of megalithic monuments in Wiltshire. *The Ancient History of Wiltshire* (TAHoW), a two volume set of books in elephant folio contained engravings of maps, landscapes, illustrations of finds, monuments and monument types. Colt Hoare was a baronet with a large fortune which allowed the pair of archaeologists their intellectual independence. Colt Hoare was an antiquarian, a traveller, an artist, landowner, designer and author. Cunnington was a wool merchant.

Volume 1 of *The Ancient History of Wiltshire* was published in 1812 so that the bicentenary falls in 2012 and provides an opportunity to revisit this pioneering book. In the intervening two hundred years, archaeologists have recognised the continuing importance of this innovatory work. It is the purpose of this article to renew interest in this book and the arts and technologies which contributed to its physical and conceptual realisation paying attention to the drawing and painting

of illustrations of objects, engraving, printing, surveying and map making.

This paper will seek to synthesise some of the many previous references to the book, seek to address the seeming lack of attention paid to the text and to highlight the work which went into its making. This paper will attempt to show that not only was this the first true archaeological book but that it has within it evidence of the origin of a modern archaeological method.

The study of this book not only highlights the study of our prehistoric past but also the period of the Enlightenment when sciences, arts, humanities and new knowledge based disciplines were emerging. The first book with map illustrations had been published in 1477. Printing became more widespread after 1500. Lithography had been invented in 1796, only two years before Cunnington began excavating. Book, magazine and newspaper publishing were now emerging industries with literacy becoming more widespread. Painting and drawing were media used to represent news and events for a world hungry for what was new. The French Revolution and its aftermath prevented Hoare from going on a further Grand Tour of the continent, so instead he toured around England, Wales and Ireland. As a result, he became the leading antiquary of his age.

To achieve his aim of final publication of *The Ancient History of Wiltshire*, Hoare employed Philip Crocker, a map maker and surveyor who also worked for the Ordnance Survey; he used the most notable engravers of the day, James Basire; Cunnington supervised the digging and recorded the excavations of nearly five hundred barrows and made meticulous notes in duplicate. Hoare devised the plan of excavation, compiled and wrote the manuscript. Additionally, it has become obvious that, whilst researching this subject, Hoare respected and more than valued Cunnington's work. He writes of Cunnington, with a rare display of sentiment, albeit subdued, in a footnote on page 175 of *The Ancient History of Wiltshire* that 'His ingenious researches are now, alas! at an end. Death has deprived me of a worthy and intelligent coadjutor. He was the *Alpha* of this publication; fate forbade that he should be the *Omega*'. They have been called

fathers of prehistory. There are numerous short references to *The Ancient History of Wiltshire* in archaeological literature. Stuart Needham et al, (2010, p.30) were the first to offer a fuller evaluation of Hoare and Cunnington's work though only in relation to the Upton Lovel Barrow. They write

The fact that we can now, with current knowledge, engage in detailed phase-specific interpretation is testimony to the landmark achievement of William Cunnington and Richard Colt Hoare two centuries ago. They had the audacity to believe that more could be learned about the ancient past of Britain through the excavation of relevant monuments than by assuming that the literature of the 'ancients' was relevant and faithful. They had the perseverance to conduct many such excavations in the face of perennial personal ailments and despite the fact that the majority of sites did not yield results that were either exciting or interpretable within the prevailing climate of knowledge. Perhaps most crucially, they realized the importance of individual context (in so far as their fledgling mode of archaeology allowed) to the extent that they recorded each burial deposit in its own right and ensured the correlation of the relevant finds in perpetuity.

There are a few primary resources which have been used for this discussion. Firstly, the primary resource for the present discussion of *The Ancient History of Wiltshire* is the 1975 Edition. Secondly, R.H. Cunnington's biography of William Cunnington, has also been useful. It was written in the 1950's just prior to RH Cunnington's death, but was not in the public domain until James Dyer and Richard Atkinson edited the text for publication in 1975. And lastly, the wiltshire.gov.uk digitised copy of the book, which is the 1973 version, has also proved useful. There are apparently omissions and errors in the 1973 edition but I have been reassured, in an email, that the 1975 edition is not a reprint of the 1973 edition. The errors concern a few place names and would probably not

impact on the current discussion.

References to *The Ancient History of Wiltshire*

The following overview of current literature provides a definition of problems, an assessment of contributions to knowledge and raises the question of how it is possible to shed new light on the writing of *The Ancient History of Wiltshire*. Archaeologists have argued that Colt Hoare and William Cunnington were the fathers of archaeology. It appears that there has been little close analysis of the text itself until preliminary work was undertaken by Glyn Daniel in the 1960's and 1970's. Daniel (1962) draws our attention to the fact that Cunnington and Colt Hoare 'were trying very hard and very consciously to eschew the romantic, acquisitive or dilettanti approach of their predecessors as antiquaries'. In *The Origins and Growth of Archaeology* (1967), Daniel discusses 'what Cunnington and Colt Hoare and their contemporaries could not appreciate [...] these antiquities could by no means be referred to the same period'. Admittedly, Cunnington and Colt Hoare struggled to understand prehistory and had a restricted knowledge framework on which to base their suppositions. It is not clear from what he has written that Daniel was aware that Thomas Lemmon had devised a scheme of three technological ages –more of this below. Daniel (1975) tells us that Colt Hoare and Cunnington abandoned terminologies involving druids and distinguished between long barrows and four types of earthen barrow.

In their review, Needham and his colleagues compare the earlier attempts at excavation by William Stukeley with those by Cunnington whose recording of the excavations was exceptional for the time. Needham et al (2010) have probably written the most complete synthesis to date. They claim that it was largely Cunnington's point of view which produced this work and viewpoint. It was also likely to have been Hoare's financial independence which gave them the freedom to define their own archaeology and publish the results as Atkinson in Dyer (Ed 1975) also points out. Several antiquarians were involved in correspondence

discussions, through which new ideas about antiquities were debated. It would appear from the correspondence between Hoare and Cunnington that they had formed a partnership and real friendship which would have been contrary to social conventions of the time.

In his major work, *Companion Encyclopedia of Archaeology*, Graeme Barker (1999, p25) makes a case for them using a more fully fledged archaeological method in that for Cunnington and Hoare barrow digging was a 'collective exercise, a professional exercise supported with documents plans and sections. Their curiosity was not confined to funeral archaeology but to landscapes as well'. He continues that Hoare wanted to be a 'real historian' and Murray (2007) supports this view, stating that Colt Hoare saw himself as an historian. Atkinson argues in *Cunnington, RH From Antiquarian to Archaeologist* (1975) that it was the first regional archaeological survey to use a modern methodology.

In his synthesis, Michael Morse (2005 p88), observed that Colt Hoare wrote 'neither shall I place too much importance on the unreliable traditions handed down to us by former antiquaries on the subject'. Morse continues by saying that 'this was merely a rhetorical ploy by Colt Hoare, who hoped to show that his work marked a significant break from that of his predecessors'.

Martin (In 2008 online), published a paper where he argues that

the simple questions that were posed in 1801 by William Cunnington, its first serious excavator, have never really been answered. Over 900 barrows have been excavated in Wiltshire alone and we are no closer to understanding the reasons behind the radically different choices of barrow form, artefacts or interment types that were taken by Early Bronze Age communities when conducting burial practices.

Chris Tilley (2009, p135) can be used as a summary here as he writes 'they set the intellectual agenda for research well into the twentieth century'. Other questions posed by Cunnington and Hoare were those which have never really

been answered since concerned who the people were who built the Wiltshire monuments and where they had come from.

Context of knowledge

Central to the entire discipline of archaeology is the concept of chronology. Before the eighteenth century people in Britain had a limited perception of the past and the depth of time, and were strongly influenced by pagan, Christian belief or ancestral myth. Moreover, calculations based on the Bible made by Bishop Ussher, suggested that human activity had been confined to a few thousand years, consequently it was thought that there was a need to distinguish periods in the past but there was little expertise in identifying and explaining its material remains. To understand their intellectual achievement it is necessary to look at the development of the idea of prehistory of the past in the nineteenth century. Not only were their records exceptional, so was the knowledge framework in which they managed to position their work. More importantly, they stuck to the principle of rational enquiry and never once do they offer Biblical conjecture as explanations for what they had found, given that the ideology that the world was created on the 23rd of October 4004BC as then current, this was remarkable. In 1802, Paley's *Natural Theology* had been written to prove that the Genesis story was exact and that Noah's flood was a fact of prehistory. It was not until 1836 that the Dane Thomsen set out his notion of Ages of Stone, Bronze and Iron where the finds in the National Museum in Copenhagen had been classified according to this scheme. Daniel (1962, pg33) says

the recognition of man's early tools for what they were and their associations with extinct animals, the acceptance of a fluvialist geology and the acceptance of man's prehistory [that] enabled a systematic prehistoric archaeology to emerge, for the fog to disperse and Flood to subside.

In his *Idea of Prehistory*, Daniel argues that for man's past to have been perceived as so short, the only possible explanation for the accumulation of so much geology, could only be accounted for by a Catastrophe Theory, of which the Noachian Flood had been one. Daniel (1962, p 51), says 'The early Victorian fundamentalist chronology was eventually replaced by a belief in a remote past'. It was about 1860 that the word 'prehistory' was accepted together with a concepts of stratigraphic geology, the deep antiquity of humans, and a belief in a three age system of Stone, Bronze and Iron. This was a revolution in thought. However, when Hoare and Cunnington were working, other theories were prevalent which were also contrary to the Genesis account. The Fall and the Flood were clearly inadequate to account for their work in Wiltshire. Unfortunately for them, it was not until 1847 that James Cowle Pritchard argued that there was not enough time in the short Ussher chronology for historical events, development of the diversity of human races and that the diversity of human languages demanded an extremely long past. Physical anthropology and linguistics had come to the same conclusions that the past involved a deep antiquity.

The text of *The Ancient History of Wiltshire*

Prior studies mentioned above have established that Cunnington and Hoare were indeed the first true archaeologists; no complete analysis of Hoare's text itself has been attempted. The pair of archaeologists set out to answer questions –who had built the monuments in Wiltshire? Were they indigenous or were they invaders or colonisers? Other questions arose about chronology which Cunnington attempted to answer without resorting to the classical literary explanations as to the origins of these antiquities. Although they managed to grasp a simple understanding of relative chronology, they were aware that they had no absolute chronology for these monuments. They developed ideas about stratigraphy, about typologies of artefacts and monuments; they had already discussed

between themselves and Thomas Leman a notion of a three age system of stone bronze and iron.

A key point to note is that they set out a systematic planned campaign of research to answer their questions through surveying landscapes, by using accurate maps, plans of sites, by using systematic excavation, and an insistence on using sections down to ground level with the full and immediate labelling of finds. Excavation became a means of answering questions not just recovering objects.

Furthermore, they began by classifying types of barrows i.e. bell, pond, long, twin, round barrows, terms which are still in use today. This was a model taken from the natural sciences. Taxonomy building was the fashion of the day. In the introduction to *The Ancient History of Wiltshire* Simpson (1975, p15) says that 'their descriptive terms for various barrow types long, bowl, bell, pond and saucer, are still those employed today'. Martin, 2008 (online) corroborates this by saying 'There have been several classifications of barrow types - eight by Colt Hoare (1810)'.

In his introduction, Hoare (1812, p16) frames the essential questions of the book by saying 'Of these, our Wiltshire downs present a very numerous variety in camps, circles and ditches. It will be a difficult matter to fix either the æra, or authors of the former (camps, circles and ditches), yet some general and probable rules may be laid down for ascertaining in some degree by what nation these camps were formed'.

Another approach they used was to build a taxonomy of burial practices relative to chronology. Hoare (Ibid, p24) describes burial practices by saying that

The second method of burying the body entire is evidently proved to be of a much later period, by the position of the head and body, and by the articles deposited with them. In this case we find the body extended at full length, the heads placed at random in a variety of directions, and instruments of iron accompanying them.

It becomes clear that they were recording certain types of finds were being found with particular types of burial, for example, beakers with burials. Subsequently, Hoare (ibid p150) describes a simple stratigraphy as evidence, where the deposit is dated by the finds and he says that

Mr. Cunnington dug out some of the earth that had fallen into the excavation, and found a fragment of fine black Roman pottery, and since that another piece in the same spot, but I have no idea that this pottery lay beneath the stones, but probably in the earth adjoining the trilithon, and after the downfall of the latter, fell with the mouldering earth into the excavation.

As mentioned above, Colt Hoare and Cunnington held a notion that iron is of a later period than bronze. Colt Hoare, when talking about finding iron objects in the barrows, says he suspected them to be of a later period than the bronze objects. Hoare (IBID p174) attempts to loosely define an Iron Age, in talking of Shrewton Windmill, he writes

Here we find an internment of a later aera and of the same period as that at Rodmead Down, pg. 47, when the custom of gathering up the legs had ceased and when the use of iron was more generally adopted; for in the early tumuli, none of the metal has ever been found.

According to Atkinson, in the Introduction of Robert Cunnington's *Antiquary to Archaeologist*, he says that Cunnington and Hoare foreshadowed a geographical approach to settlement patterns and the siting of earthworks; the recording of results in a systematic manner; the use of excavation, not purely as a treasure hunt but for research purposes.' Cunnington was asking questions to be answered by their excavations. Using a landscape stratigraphy, to sequence events around Stonehenge, Hoare (Ibid, pg145) argues that

On minute investigation you will plainly see, that the *vallum* of the *agger* surrounding the work, has been evidently curtailed, by

forming the *tumulus* on the north-west side of the circle, which induced us to open it, when, much to our surprise, we found within it a simple interment of burned bones; from whence we may fairly infer, that this sepulchral barrow existed on the plain, I will not venture to say before the construction of STONEHENGE; but probably before the ditch was thrown up; and I scarcely know how we can separate the æra of the one from the other.

Cunnington and Colt Hoare were using basic stratigraphy, a landscape approach to attempt a sequencing of what had happened in the prehistoric past and attempted to use finds as dating material. Much has been made of Hoare writing about working 'in a fog' but little about why this book is so remarkable. Further work on this aspect of the text would benefit the study archaeology.

The production and the publication of the text

Richard Colt Hoare's single greatest achievement was to publish *The Ancient History of Wiltshire*. His knowledge of books and his skills as an editor led to the final realisation of this work which was complex for its time. Not only is the quality of the illustrations superb, but they constitute an historical record of the sites in the early 19th century. There were several individuals involved with the production *The Ancient History of Wiltshire*, Cunnington, Colt Hoare, Phillip Crocker and James Basire, the engraver.

Phillip Crocker was the cartographer who also worked for the Ordnance Survey, founded in 1791. Needham (2010) says of Crocker that owing to his surveys Hoare and Cunnington were able to catalogue barrows against finds so we now know from which barrow the finds came. Sam Smiles (2007, p 2) also writes that

By the 1790s, however, it was at last possible to recruit technical

proficiency that matched the antiquarian's demands. The Society viewed the recording of monuments as essentially a research enterprise, where accuracy of depiction was the paramount virtue if scholarship was to be advanced.

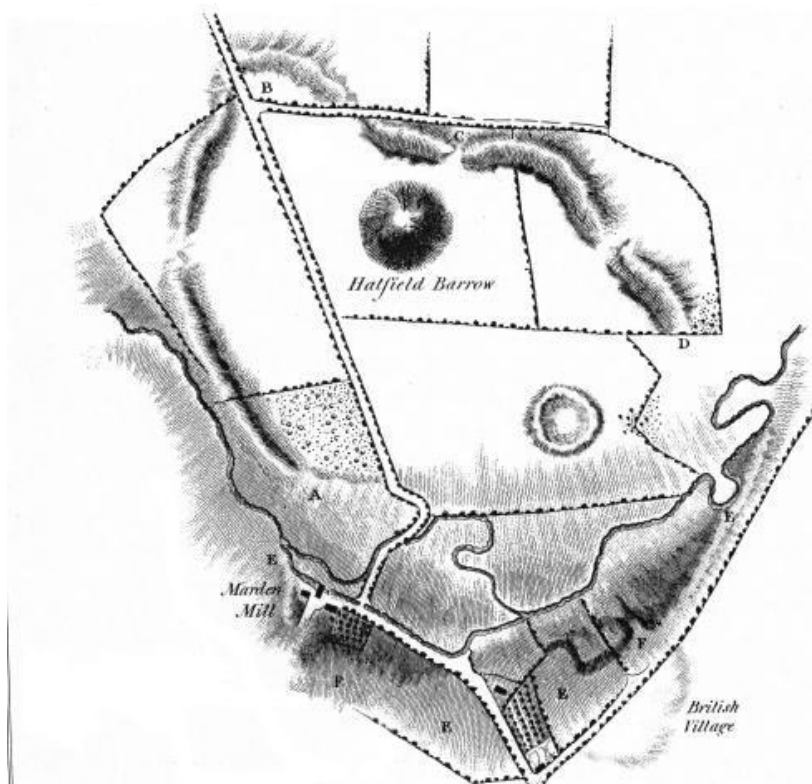


Fig 1

To really appreciate the accuracy of Crocker's surveying and map making, Henry Rothwell has overlaid Crocker's map, as seen in Fig 1, upon a video of a satellite shot taken from Google Earth which demonstrates that the fit is absolutely perfect. This can be accessed at

[www.http://www.digitaldigging.co.uk/features/marden-henge/marden-henge-hatfield-enclosure-hatfield-barrow-archaeology.html](http://www.digitaldigging.co.uk/features/marden-henge/marden-henge-hatfield-enclosure-hatfield-barrow-archaeology.html)

Accessed 27/08/2011

The illustrations of finds and monuments were originally painted in watercolour as in Fig 2, by Phillip Crocker, and then were engraved by James Basire for printing.

The work was published (in sections from five volumes) from Cunnington's records of excavations which have been archived at Burlington House as well as the notebooks archived at Devizes Museum. They are different versions, as those held by Devizes museum have been annotated by Hoare. These were the source materials for *The Ancient History of Wiltshire*. The main collection of Crocker's paintings and illustrations are held at Devizes Museum, although Fig 2 is held by the Society of Antiquaries.

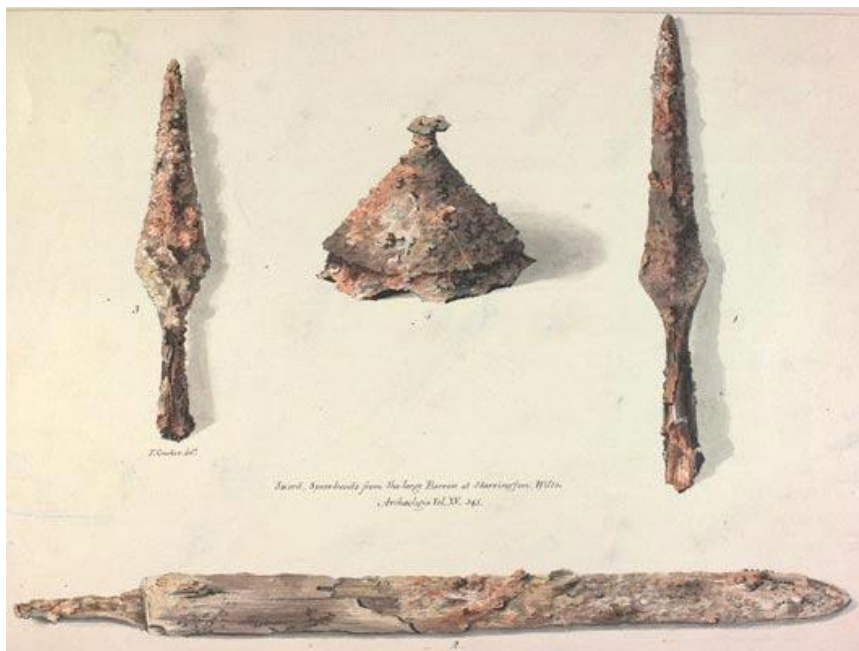


FIG 2

James Basire (1730-1802), also known as James Basire Sr., was an English engraver. He is the most significant of a family of engravers, and noted for his

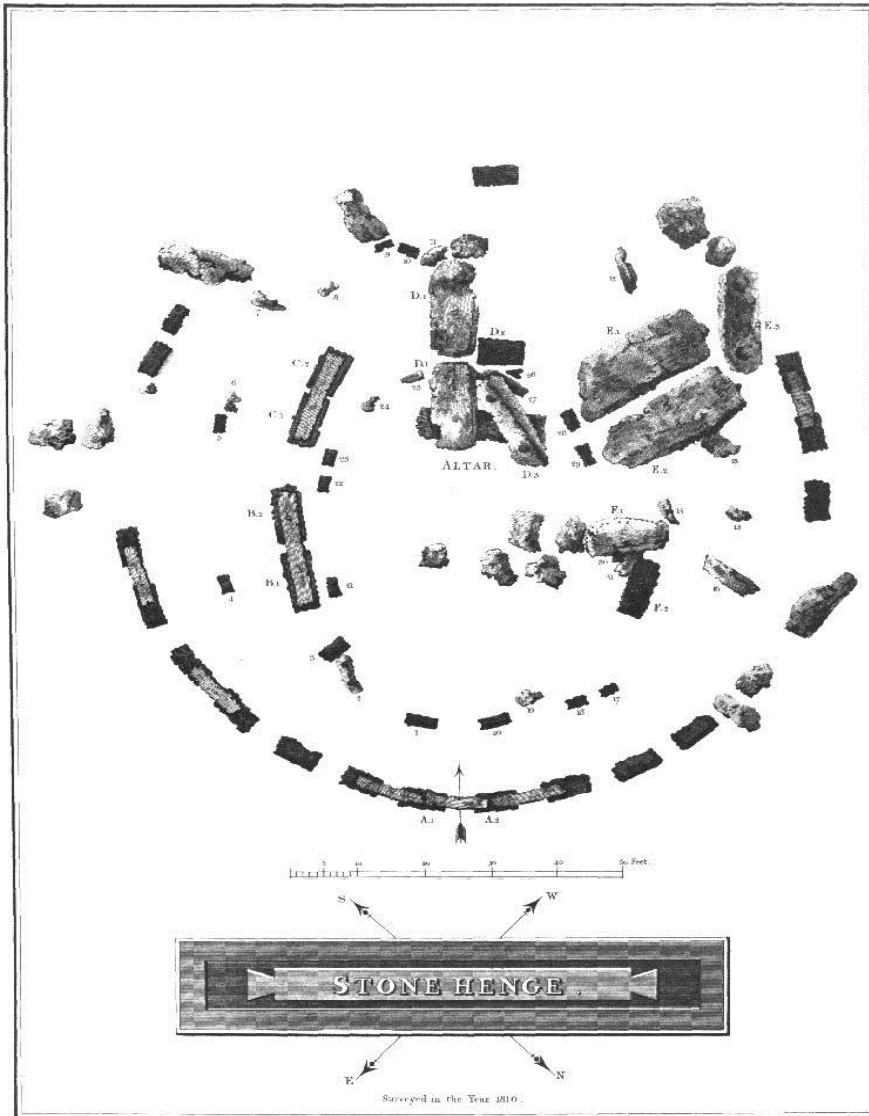


FIG 3

apprenticing of the young William Blake. But it is unlikely that he was the engraver of *The Ancient History of Wiltshire* as this was more likely to have been James Basire (1769-1822). Fig 3 shows an example of his engraving of the plan of

Stonehenge. There were four generations of Basires who were all engravers and due to the longevity of their overlapping careers there is some difficulty in the attribution of their works.

CONCLUSION

Most archaeologists agree about the significance of the pioneering work these men accomplished. There has been disagreement in the past over who did what in the realisation of *The Ancient History of Wiltshire*. In the final analysis this is irrelevant. What a team of people achieved in the early 19th century is monumental. This book deserves more attention.

To sum up, a comprehensive survey and review of all the extant records, various editions of the text, of the finds and contexts of the monuments would further clarify this early archaeological work. Needham et al have shown that a thorough review of the finds and excavations from Cunnington and Hoare's excavations can reveal more information. Philip Crocker deserves to have his career thoroughly studied as he made the whole early project of early landscape archaeology a reality. The history of map-making and book-making would be benefit through such a project. Henry Rothwell has demonstrated very elegantly Crocker's brilliance as a surveyor. Crocker's body of work, examples of which are shown in the Frontispiece and Fig 2, warrants more publicity.

Finally, I would like to thank my Facebook friend Cult W Hore, whose love of this

book, the life and work of Richard Colt Hoare and William Cunnington, his lifelong enthusiasm for archaeology, his in-depth knowledge of the archaeology of his home town (Swindon) and its environs, and without whom I would never have learned, at this point in my life, about the significance of this important book. This is a tale of social networking, about how things spread and how we can learn from each other on social networking sites such as Facebook (good press for once). And thank you, Cult W Hore, for the offer to lend me your book, on Facebook, when you didn't even know me. For that I consider myself to be your friend.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Frontispiece

West View of Stonehenge, Amesbury, north district, Illustration: Chapter 7 - Amesbury, North District pg 53.

<http://history.wiltshire.gov.uk/community/gettextimage.php?id=2020>

FIG 1

Marden Henge, Marden Henge Philip Crocker, for Colt Hoare's Ancient History of Wiltshire.

<http://www.wiltshireheritagecollections.org.uk/wiltshirestourheadsites.asp?page=place&filename=stheadpl.mdf&itemId=Beechingstoke%20G1>

FIG 2

Drawing of sword, shield boss and spearheads from the barrow at Sherrington, 1804

Philip Crocker (1780-1840)

Watercolour on paper

28.5 x 37.4 (cm)

Society of Antiquaries of London

<http://makinghistory.sal.org.uk/page.php?cat=4&sub=3>

FIG 3

Book No. 56 the Ancient History of Wiltshire by Sir Richard Colt Hoare

Chapter No. 7 - Amesbury, north district

Page No. 43 - Amesbury, north district, Illustration: Stonehenge site plan

http://history.wiltshire.gov.uk/community/gettextimage.php?book_no=056&chapter_no=07&page_no=0043

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