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IN THE SHADOW OF THE STONES

Avebury, England



Plate 4: Post Office, Avebury

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IN THE SHADOW OF THE STONES Avebury, England

*Blue blind like a cloud past the moon,
the other keyhole, a crack
of indoor dark. What did it mean,
the way the village turned its back*

*On the circle that even the church
would not enter? I could almost see
how it begged to be rubbed, that old itch
folk just can't leave be.
(‘Habitation’, Gross 1996)*

Avebury is a small rural village. However, unlike most other villages in Britain, you can walk along the main street and view massive stones, the megaliths of the stone circles of Avebury that form part of an extraordinary Neolithic landscape (frontispiece, plates 5, 7). John Aubrey famously commented in the 17th century that Avebury ‘does as much exceed in greatness the renowned Stonehenge as a Cathedral doeth a parish Church’ (quoted in Saunders 1991).⁴⁶ Anyone can walk among the stones and along the henge today, the only obstacles being other visitors and tourists, the occasional local villager, or now and then the sheep who graze within the circle (an integral part of ‘monument maintenance’). The serenity of this idyll is broken only by the hum of traffic that flows along the route of the A4361 that transects the henge, and the thundered ‘Get off the Stones!’ warning from the druidic Keeper of the Stones. Of course, if the Keeper has not spotted the errant rock-climber this transgression may have been observed by a passing National Trust archaeologist, who will deliver a similar message, albeit with less volume.

⁴⁶ The construction of the main Avebury Neolithic monuments began around 2850 BC. Although its origins are slightly earlier than Stonehenge, the period of use is deemed to be comparable.

This and the following chapter will consider how the various interests and values that emerge at Avebury lead to divergent – often conflicting – experiences and understandings of the landscape, and saturate it with meaning and significance. In particular, I explore the special attachments, belongings and embodied understanding of place that are expressed by the Avebury village community, and how these collide with otherwise prioritised heritage values, notably the recognition of Neolithic Avebury as an archaeological landscape of national and World Heritage significance. The discussion below introduces the village of Avebury and the wider Avebury World Heritage Site, and broadly describes the village community. It reviews the discourses and processes that have acted to create and privilege a mono-thematic archaeological narrative. The consequence is the creation of an ideological hierarchy that has transformed Avebury from a village with a stone circle to a stone circle with a village.

Background

Avebury and its Neolithic henge and stone circles lie within the County of Wiltshire, 30 kilometres north of Stonehenge (figure 1). The Parish of Avebury falls within the local government area of Kennet District Council, which has administrative offices in the small market town of Devizes, some 7 kilometres south-west of Avebury. Avebury is composed of two settlements, the older village that spills into the land within the henge and main circle, and Avebury Trusloe, the more modern village to the southwest of the circle. There are around 250 households across the two settlements (some 100 lying within the older village), with a population of approximately 500 people (the broader Avebury Parish includes around 650). Locally the newer and older village areas are colloquially referred to as ‘Little Avebury’ and ‘Big Avebury’ respectively: where there is a need to distinguish between the two parts of Avebury village, I have opted to use this nomenclature. All following references to ‘Avebury’, therefore, refer to the village as an amalgam of these two communities.

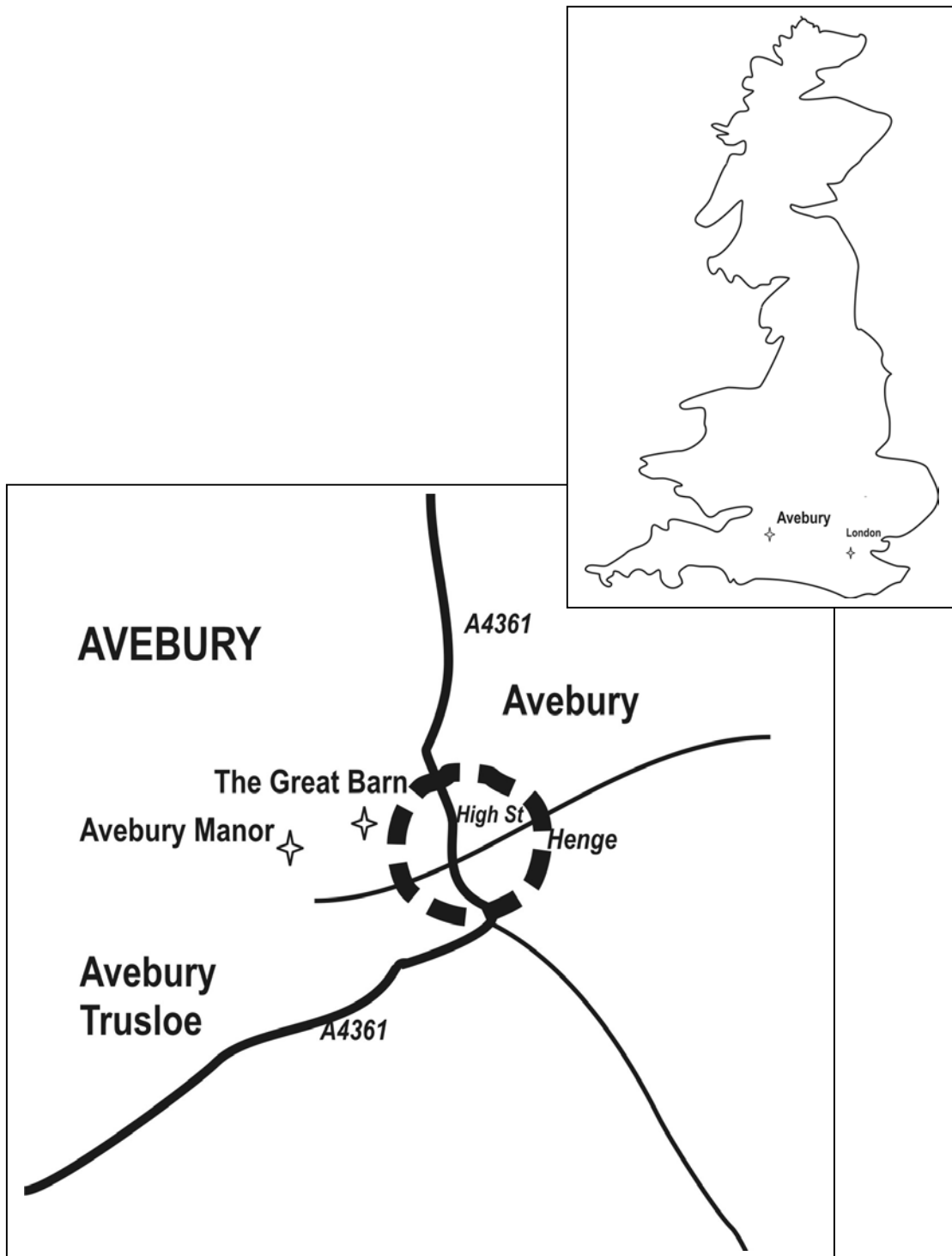


Figure 1: Location map, Avebury

Since the 1986 inscription of the Avebury henge and its associated Neolithic monuments on the World Heritage List (see Appendix 1), a large part of the area surrounding Avebury has been incorporated into what is today described as the Avebury World Heritage Site (WHS). The WHS and its boundaries have been adopted as a discrete management entity by the National Trust and English Heritage; hence, for ease of discussion, 'Avebury WHS' (or simply 'WHS') is used below to signify the larger Avebury heritage landscape. The existing boundaries of the World Heritage Site enclose an area of 22.5 square kilometres, and include the six principal monuments of the World Heritage designation.⁴⁷ The effect, according to the WHS Management Plan (English Heritage 1998), is to recognise that it is an archaeological landscape and not just a series of individual monuments.⁴⁸

For many, the name Avebury is synonymous with the massive Neolithic henge and its stone circles, rather than the small rural village. The henge outer bank and ditch are 1.3 kilometres in diameter, enclosing an area of 11.5 hectares – it is estimated that the monument originally included around 180 standing stones (Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission 1985: 5). Together with the stone circles (one outer and two smaller inner circles) the henge forms the focus of an impressive physical landscape that incorporates a series of monumental features including The Sanctuary, West Kennet Avenue, West Kennet Long Barrow, Windmill Hill and Silbury Hill. In addition to the Neolithic monuments, the Avebury landscape boasts important features of built heritage and of natural conservation value. Most of the Avebury WHS is made up of an intensely farmed landscape that incorporates twelve farms, two of which are completely within the WHS. Currently 65% of the WHS land is arable with around 30% in temporary or permanent pasture (English Heritage 1998: 45). In 1994, the National Trust took over a 10-year term Guardianship of the principal Avebury monuments through management agreements with English Heritage. Today, together with English Heritage, the Trust has responsibility for the management of the

⁴⁷ At the time of my fieldwork (2001/2002) these boundaries were under review.

⁴⁸ However, neither Avebury nor Stonehenge have been inscribed on the World Heritage List as cultural landscapes, and the combination of legislative constraints (under the *Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979*) and the English Heritage management policy for the WHS prescribe that the archaeology is affectively managed as a series of discrete monuments and sites.

'heritage values' of the Avebury landscape, with both the identification and management of that heritage at times being contentious and divisive.

The *Avebury World Heritage Site Management Plan* (English Heritage 1998: 2; and see Appendix 1) asserts that 'Avebury's monuments and features have exerted a considerable visual and cultural influence on the surrounding landscape for almost 5000 years'. This has resulted in a substantial body of literature, ranging from scholarly to popular to esoteric. Copious reports and publications have been produced on its archaeology, origins and development (see for example Burl 1979; English Heritage 1998; Malone 2001; Pitts 2001; Saunders 1991; Ucko et al. 1991; and the extensive bibliographies in AAHRG 2001 and Pollard & Reynolds 2002). Considerable material referencing Avebury is related to its status as a spiritual and cult site. Many of these include assertions to the creation of the henge and stone circles (including natural and supernatural origins) and to its purpose and meaning (see Dames 1996; Francis 2001; Meaden 1999. See Eliade 1978: 114–124 for a discussion of the religious meanings of megalithic constructions).

It is generally accepted that the Neolithic creators of the Avebury monuments attached ritual significance to the landscape and its features. More recently the monuments and landscape have again become a focal point for groups and individuals for their religious and spiritual values. Over the last several hundred years, the monuments have been a site of special interest for antiquarians, authors, artists and archaeologists – not to mention the Avebury residents. The aesthetics and ambience of the area in which the monuments are found are appreciated by residents and local and other visitors, many of whom are international tourists. It is estimated that Avebury receives around 350,000 visitors annually (English Heritage 1998: 27).⁴⁹ A 1997 visitor survey indicates that while 13.8% of visitors are international, 28% of visitors are from addresses within Wiltshire (ibid: 63); that is, over one quarter of visitors are resident within a short distance of Avebury, suggesting that the place has special significance for members of various local communities. The local visitors are often repeat visitors

⁴⁹ These numbers decreased across 2000–2002 due to the combined impacts of foot and mouth disease and the general tourism decline following the terrorist attacks in New York in September 2001.

– Avebury has been and continues to be a popular destination for family outings, and a favoured spot to simply walk the dog or stretch one's legs.

Interest in Avebury as a 'heritage' place dates back to the 16th century. John Leland, Henry VIII's chaplain and librarian, rode through Avebury around 1541. Although he referred only to the earthworks, as a result of his writings Avebury was recorded for the first time as 'an ancient monument' (Burl 1979: 40). However, most histories attribute John Aubrey as the 'finder' of the 'forgotten' village of Avebury and its stones while hunting on the Marlborough Downs in 1649. Of course, many people would have known of Avebury, including the villagers who lived there at the time. The consistent reference to the discovery by Aubrey reflects the emphasis (overemphasis) placed on written sources as explanations of the past, and as Pollard and Reynolds (2002: 10) so aptly note, a 'fixation on the activities of the good and the great'.

It appears that during the early 14th century there had been a negative reaction to the stones. Many of the circle stones and the megaliths lining the West Kennet Avenue were buried at that time (Pitts 1999: 36). One interpretation is that superstition and fear of the stones led to the destruction or burying of many of them – the triumph of Christianity over the evils of paganism and the devil. This practice continued through the medieval period (National Trust 1998: 15–16; Burl 1979: 37).⁵⁰ Another suggests that the burying or removal of the stones may have been more simply a product of clearing the land for alternative uses (see Pollard & Reynolds 2002: 246), or a desire to shatter the megaliths to use the stone for building purposes.

By the time the antiquarian William Stukeley visited the site in 1719, many of the Avebury megaliths had vanished. Stukeley recorded the area over the next 5 years, including the decimation of more stones by the villagers (English Heritage 1998: 14). Although Aubrey had some 60 years earlier expressed concerns about the attitude of the locals to the standing stones, Stukeley was probably the first to paint the Avebury village community as a 'threat' to the megaliths and to favour the significance of the

⁵⁰ For modern examples of Christianity motivated destruction of 'pagan' places see Munjeri (2000: 42) and Roe & Taki (1999: 412).

stones and the surrounding monumental landscape over the expressed interests of the living community.

Over time, concerns for the future of the monuments have led to parts of the Avebury landscape being privately purchased to protect them from development and building expansion. Sir John Lubbock (who became the first Lord Avebury) purchased parts of the circle in 1872. His interests were almost entirely with the monuments: 'unfortunately for us, the pretty little village of Abury [sic], like some beautiful parasite, has grown up at the expense, and in the midst of, the ancient temple' (cited in Ucko et al. 1991: 2; see also Pitts 2001: 51). This was the start of a program of private land purchasing that has resulted in over one-third of the Avebury World Heritage Site being owned by the National Trust today.

By the end of the 19th century, over 300 people were living and working along the Avebury main street (Pitts 1999: 37). Most of the villagers were involved in agriculture, either directly working on the land or as craftsmen serving the needs of the industry (Arnold 1995: 7). Over the next few decades, the increase in mechanisation and in mass production techniques led to increasing unemployment and the movement of villagers away from rural areas to seek work in the cities and towns. It was during this period that the village became the focus for a group of people who would substantially affect the lives of the villagers: archaeologists.

Monolithic Gardening: the Creation of an Archaeological Landscape

The conceptualisation of Avebury as a significant heritage site, and the introduction of a management regime that emphasises not only one discourse, but one theme within that discourse, is a relatively recent phenomenon (see B. Edwards in prep., which pursues the history of the heritage appropriation of Avebury). It should also be remembered that before the 1930s much of the henge and associated monuments were on private and enclosed land with limited rights of access. It was not until the 1980s that free access inside the henge was opened up (Gingell 1999).

Harold St George Gray was the first to undertake systematic archaeological excavation at any of the Avebury monuments, establishing the Neolithic date of the site in 1908. Alexander Keiller, a wealthy and somewhat enigmatic amateur archaeologist, developed a long association with archaeological research at Avebury after purchasing the Windmill Hill site in 1924 (Murray 1999: 29).⁵¹ As with Sir John Lubbock, Keiller was motivated by development threats to parts of the Neolithic landscape. He continued excavations at Windmill Hill with Gray until 1927, although it was clear that their professional relationship was less than amiable (Murray 1999: 44). He continued excavating at the Windmill Hill site until 1929, returning in 1934 with Stuart Piggott to begin a massive excavation of West Kennet Avenue. During the 1934 project, Keiller re-erected 27 stones. He took out a 14-year lease on Avebury Manor in 1935 (plate 8), bought it in 1937 and created the Avebury Museum within the former stables (today the Alexander Keiller Museum).

In the following years he managed to buy up most of the land that included the stone circles, and parts of the surrounding terrain. His program of excavation continued, incorporating what Piggott termed 'megalithic landscape gardening', a process that involved the restoration and reconstruction of several important monuments, including the re-erection of numerous buried stones,⁵² and the demolition of a number of buildings within the circle (English Heritage 1998: 14). The demolition was supported by both the Ministry of Works and the Rural District Council: that is, Keiller did not act without official sanction.

Although there are antiquarian antecedents, Alexander Keiller is possibly the most significant figure in the modern history of Avebury and its archaeology, and its subsequent significance as a site deserving of World Heritage status. Depending on the historical interpretation of his actions, Keiller is either a folk hero or a heinous villain. It is debatable as to whether Avebury would have gained the level of heritage

⁵¹ For example, it is not well known that Keiller provided the loan that seeded the launch of the archaeological journal *Antiquity* (Murray 1999: 47). Murray (1999: 68) further notes that although contemporary professional archaeologists such as Mortimer Wheeler may be more remembered, Keiller's study of causeway enclosures was in fact seminal and his Windmill Hill excavations made a ground breaking contribution to British Neolithic history.

⁵² In late 2003 the National Trust announced that geophysical surveys had uncovered at least another 15 stones buried within the circle (http://www.ananova.com/news/story/sm_843553.html 13/02/04).

recognition it has today if it were not for his combined program of archaeological investigation, megalith (re)erection and village demolition. Certainly, the lives of the Avebury villagers may have taken a different course, and they recognise this in the various recollections, memories and mythologising that recreate the Keiller story. By local definition Keiller was never a 'true' villager, but for a time he was not only the largest landowner, but also lord of the manor. The employment opportunities he offered also meant that Avebury was well-off at the time, in comparison to other local villages.

After embarking on his 1934 Avebury land purchase program, Keiller commissioned a survey of the monuments, which highlighted that Avebury was a national 'archaeological disgrace' and that the henge banks contained a collection of pigsties, derelict corrugated buildings, crumbling cottages, and a collection of sheds that served as the local garage – side by side with more sturdy and attractive village buildings. Following an arrangement with Rawlins, the garage owner, the garage was relocated outside the circle, and away from the monuments – where it remains today. In the process of vegetation and building removal, and stone re-erection, Keiller created what has been described as 'the visitor's Avebury' (Pitts 2001: 205), turning a place dominated by local village rural existence into a public archaeological park. B. Edwards (2001: 3) equates Keiller's program 'of installing his vision of its prehistoric state by clearing the circle of subsequent history' to the reinvention of prehistoric Britain at the expense of a formerly quintessential English village.⁵³ In addition to the personal impacts on relocated villagers, the works resulted in the removal of chunks of the tangible village past from the Avebury landscape.

Murray (1999: 83, 103) notes that although there was opposition from certain people to the removal of buildings within the circle, many of the villagers perceived Keiller as a generous patron and provider of employment, even if a little eccentric. He was aware that some of the villagers saw a threat in the archaeological work. Commenting on a proposed Office of Works scheme to buy more land around Avebury, he acknowledged the local attitude that 'archaeologists are behind it all to the detriment

⁵³ Although the 'archetypal' or 'quintessential' English village is itself an image or representation and not necessarily a depiction of reality.

of the local inhabitants' (correspondence to Ormsby Gore, Office of Works, 2 January 1937, cited in Murray 1999: 88). His excavations were not supported by all the villagers, with some opposed on the grounds that the site had a mystery and anonymity that would be unnecessarily disturbed by uncovering the stones and altering the landscape (Murray 1999: 103). This opposition was reflected in 1937 by a number of letters to newspapers by Avebury residents, including one comment that Avebury now 'somewhat resembles a military cemetery in France' (in Ucko et al. 1991: 258). A differing point of view to 'that of archaeologists' was expressed in an article in *The Times* (21/07/37):

Village Pride at Avebury – the Preservation Scheme

Visitor's memories of Avebury will surely in most cases be enhanced by some picture of an English Village and an English landscape rich in charm and beauty ... it is perhaps natural that the villagers of Avebury – a population of fewer than 300 – should regard the antiquities of their neighbourhood with less devoted enthusiasm than that of archaeologists. But the village itself, in which they have a proper pride, is an essential part of the preservation scheme. Happily the scheme is not seeking to prevent the natural growth of the village by turning it into a sterilised beauty spot ... further, it is proposed that as opportunity arises certain unsightly buildings already in the village shall be pulled down.

A Letter to the Editor of *The Times* in the same month from L.G.M. Young commented on Keiller's plans, cautioning of the need to '... reconcile the interests of those who are concerned with Avebury as a monument, and those who have known it for many years as a village, the chief feature in a landscape of exquisite, because unobtrusive beauty'. Undeniably, however, the Preservation Scheme was directed at the protection of the archaeology of Avebury. *The Marlborough and Andover Times* (12/11/37), reporting on objections to the application put forward by the Wiltshire Joint Planning Committee, noted that:

... the committee had based the scheme largely on the importance of the monuments, and on the importance of providing it with a setting which would render the whole place useful and attractive for all time ... [the committee] realised in full what the attempts to make that area safe for the archaeological standpoint had meant to a lot of the inhabitants.

The above confirms that local voices of disquiet are not a recent phenomenon, and that the necessity to consider and balance the multiple interests in Avebury have been variously and consistently mooted.

Today, the villagers hold their own views about Keiller's activities: some experienced his involvement in the village first hand, as children. Others know of his works through their parents and their observations of how the village changed in their times. A resident of Little Avebury, whose family has lived in Avebury for generations, thinks that the village 'was in a way destroyed by Keiller and other archaeologists – the heart went out of it ... it is hard work now to get the villagers involved in anything ... there is no enthusiasm like there used to be ... there is still considerable unhappiness with what Keiller did and it won't go away until the last of the locals passes away'. Another woman, who has lived in Big Avebury all her life (her grandfather moved there in 1918) suggested otherwise: 'Keiller looked after people ... the Trust doesn't ... he gave people jobs during the depression'.

This dichotomy of opinion may well reflect the histories of both families – the former being among those who were 'displaced' from Big Avebury and who now see themselves shut out of the opportunity to return to the older part of the village. For these people it is difficult not to see Keiller (and the National Trust) as the source of their current unease; the contradiction lies in the recognition by villagers in both groups that many of those who moved to the newer settlement at Avebury Trusloe in the 1940s left homes that were derelict for new houses that were both sound and enhanced by 'modern conveniences', including running water. Memory is strongly implicated in the interaction with the way in which change is interpreted: the understanding of the present is a combination of both cultural continuity and cultural change, together with the idiosyncratic concerns of the rememberer and his or her life. Memory is the locus of the interaction between individual realities and realities that are outside the individual. While memories are intensely personal they are also reflective of a culture at a given place and time (Teski & Climo 1995: 2). Memory is inextricably implicated in desires to recall – and preserve – the past.

However his project may be judged by present communities and archaeologists, Keiller was undeniably passionate about his work, and about the Avebury stones. He asserted in a letter to Norman Cook, the Curator of the Avebury museum that ‘... no-one with so wholehearted and innate a love of the stones themselves as I, myself’ was likely to have undertaken the work (cited in Murray 1999: 89). His legacy was a radical change in both the condition of the monuments and the pattern of the village buildings within the circle and the surrounding fields. Further works were halted by the intervening war, and with his fortune and health in decline Keiller offered his holdings in Avebury to the National Trust. They were bought through public subscription, excluding the manor house (which was finally sold to a private owner in 1955), and the land passed to the ownership of the National Trust in 1942.⁵⁴ This consolidated Keiller’s plan that the Neolithic monuments at Avebury be saved as the heritage of the British nation.

In the years following Keiller’s work, numerous archaeological investigations have taken place at Avebury and the surrounding monuments (see the bibliographies in AAHRG 2001 and Pollard & Reynolds 2002), and continue to do so under the direction of the National Trust and English Heritage (see Appendix 1). Consequently Avebury has been the site of a professional ‘rite of passage’ for many archaeologists. From 1908 to 1967 archaeologists have worked in the Avebury area for 31 of the 59 years (Pitts 2001: 62). Although more recent research policies discourage the sort of physical intervention that characterised earlier excavation projects, Avebury continues to provide fertile ground for archaeological interest. The more recent generation of archaeologists with a professional interest in the site include those who now work in heritage management positions with the National Trust or English Heritage.

Together with Stonehenge, Avebury has been a ‘proving ground’ for British archaeology (see English Heritage 1997: 11) following the beginnings of antiquarian interest in the 17th and 18th centuries. This has been not only in terms of individual endeavour: threats to the integrity of Avebury’s monuments played a significant part

⁵⁴ Bender (1995: 265), addressing the protest about public versus private land following attempts in the late 1870s to introduce a National Monuments Preservation Bill, notes that the National Trust (est. 1895) reflects a ‘wonderful British blurring of the distinction between ‘private’ and ‘public’ ownership’ in its mandate to hold properties and land privately in the national and public interest.

in the passing of legislative protection in Britain (see Chippendale 1983; Ucko et al. 1991: 257). Sir John Lubbock was a major facilitator of the development and introduction of the *Ancient Monuments Bill* 1873, which became statutory in 1882. In 1883, Silbury Hill and West Kennet Long Barrow were the first two ancient British monuments to be protected under the new Act (Pitts 1999: 38).

Archaeology, however, is not just the domain of professional archaeologists. There are several local archaeological, wildlife and community groups who hold a particular interest in Avebury. One of the most active is the Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society, which was founded in 1853 and has played a prominent role in research at Avebury (and Stonehenge) since that time. The Society has a membership of 1200, is based in Devizes, and runs the Wiltshire Museum, which includes an impressive library and archive. Through this organisation several generations of the Wiltshire community have been actively involved in archaeological work at Avebury.⁵⁵

The National Trust

The process of relocation of villagers and demolition of buildings that was a legacy of Keiller's program was continued by the National Trust after 1942. In order to provide homes for the displaced villagers, a new housing scheme was proposed at Trusloe, the small hamlet located immediately south-west of the village. The decision was ratified by the Rural District Council in 1946 and a number of the Avebury villagers were rehoused into what was arguably much better accommodation than they had left. However, there were emotional impacts. These ranged from the individual distress suffered by some who were evicted from their homes, to the sense of displacement by those who were relocated, to the disruption of the community sense of wellbeing and integrity.

⁵⁵ However, see Faulkner 2000 for a review of the trend in professional archaeological practice in the UK that restricts opportunities for community involvement in projects. I also suggest it is important to avoid conflating 'community archaeology' (inclusive participation in archaeological projects) with community attachments to places that may be subject to archaeological investigation.

During the later 1940s and the 1950s the removal of substandard buildings from the henge was continued under the auspices of the National Trust and the Ministry of Works (National Trust 1997: 19; Gingell 1996). Keiller's work and the subsequent National Trust demolitions have been criticised for the impact on the village as a community and as a perceived attempt to create a mono-faceted past at the expense of a landscape of continued occupation:

Swept away with [the cottages] was the accumulated evidence of occupation extending beyond the Dark Ages ... the Saxon, medieval, and pre-enclosure history of the landscape thus disappeared to be replaced by Keiller's single-faceted past. Surviving photographs and recollections of surviving villagers tell a sorry tale of homes demolished, outbuildings and workshops obliterated, chapels razed to make way for car parks ... the interwoven eclectic nature of Avebury's heritage was indicative of its past, and this interaction of the community with the Avebury landscape is crucial to our understanding of this place. (B. Edwards 2001: 4)

It was not until the 1960s and a growth of 'heritage consciousness' that National Trust policy and government regulations encouraged the retention and preservation of the village buildings. The physical elements of the village today can be attributed to earlier programs of clearance, and the transition to more recent policies of government bodies and heritage management agencies. Peter Fowler, an archaeologist who has been associated with Avebury since the 1950s, provides a reminder that the Avebury of today is the result of a considerable 'workover':

In the 1950s [the National Trust] was still busy buying up properties within the Circles as they became available, not to look after them but to knock them down. This seemed a little off even then, but reflected a hangover of a restoration tradition that aimed to restore a site to some imagined earlier reality. At Avebury the destructive acquisition was intended to clear the circles of that part of the village which had had the ill manners to creep into it since Saxon times ... the effect is to underscore the point that what we see at Avebury today is as much to do with the twentieth-century AD as BC. (Fowler 1995: 12)

Today, the significance of Avebury as a Neolithic landscape is enhanced by the integrity of its magnificent earthworks and the megalithic features, although it should be kept in mind that a substantive portion of the standing megaliths are upright as a result of the endeavours of Alexander Keiller. At the same time, the Trust acknowledges that Avebury and its surrounds provide significant material evidence of

a history that incorporates Roman, Saxon and medieval settlement, in fact 'these elements all add to the interpretation of a landscape where the entire span of visible remains of human activity in Britain, through 6000 years, can be seen' (National Trust 1997: 8). There is less explicit acknowledgment of the history of the village over the last few hundred years.

The National Trust currently owns and manages about a third of the Avebury WHS, making it the single major landholder within the WHS. Even should they wish to change this status, the Trust cannot do so under current legislative constraints.⁵⁶ A number of farm properties and houses within Big Avebury are owned by the Trust, with the result that many of the residents are Trust tenants. The National Trust also manages the two museums in Avebury: The Barn Gallery, housing the interpretative display 'Avebury – 6000 Years of Mystery' (plate 9), and the Alexander Keiller Museum.

The management of their WHS responsibilities is guided by the 1997 National Trust *Avebury Management Plan* (National Trust 1997; see Appendix 1). It is clear that there is room for potential conflict when the Trust's priorities do not coincide with those of the local residents, particularly as the Trust defines the property under management as 'an archaeological estate'. The National Trust recognises that relationships with the community living and/or working among the monuments 'has clouded debate on conservation issues for two generations' (National Trust 1997: 45–47). The Trust identifies three 'communities' at Avebury: the village residents; those drawn from the surrounding area for whom Avebury provides a focus; and the combination of the nation and humankind. There is acknowledgement that earlier clearance policies have resulted in a lingering sense of mistrust among longer term residents, and that since the 1970s there has been a new group of residents who have chosen to live in Avebury (and could afford to do so) in response to the retention of the special character of the place. The conservation of this character is identified in the management plan as one of the Trust's priorities, as is the need to consult with the villagers and take account of their concerns. However, other than possible impact

⁵⁶ The National Trust and its actions are directed by the *National Trust Act 1971* (Acts 1907–1971). Under the Act, properties vested in the trust are inalienable.

from visitors, the villagers' interests and concerns fail to gain attention in the Trust's main objective for Avebury, which is

... to preserve the extensive and intricate complex of archaeological features of the world heritage site within an appropriate landscape setting. In addition it must provide access and information for substantial (but not unlimited) numbers of visitors, enabling them to enjoy the property and to learn from it, while minimising their impact on the village and on the monuments themselves. (National Trust 1997: 5; see also Gingell 1996)

Local community input and liaison to management issues that concern the WHS and the actions of the National Trust is provided through representation on two committees: a Working Party (convened in 1989 to prepare the management strategy for the WHS) and one of its two sub-committees, the Traffic and Visitor Management Group (TVM). Two representatives from the Parish Council sit on the Working Party and the TVM, and the TVM membership includes representation from the Avebury Society and the Avebury Farming Group. There is no community representative on the second sub-committee, the Avebury Archaeological and Historical Research Group (AAHRG), an 'informal' group of academics and archaeologists (English Heritage 1998: 36; see also AAHRG 2001). It was only recently that a historian interested in the more recent history of Avebury was invited to join the AAHRG. Discussions with both National Trust representatives and the WHS Officer, an archaeologist employed by English Heritage, indicate that most local community members use their Parish Council representatives as a communication point for concerns. This was confirmed by the (then) Chair of the Parish Council. The WHS Officer notes that she spends more of her time dealing with concerns and queries from farmers than any other group. In the event of proposals for major changes or issues arising, the Trust generally asks the Parish Council to convene a special village meeting for matters to be raised in a public forum.

Both the Avebury Society and the Avebury Farming Group represent specific and restricted interests. The former appears to have little support by 'true villagers' who perceive the group as being mostly comprised of 'outsiders' and not representative of

village opinion.⁵⁷ The members of the Parish Council can be seen to represent the community more holistically. However, I have argued in Chapter 3 that reliance on organisational spokespeople to present an inclusive viewpoint is often problematic, as is an indication of community response that relies on attendance at public meetings. In the case of the Parish Council this appears to be balanced by informal approaches by individuals to members of the Parish Council. The (then) Council Chair identifies that it is his responsibility to present the views of the community, no matter how these may conflict with his personal feelings on certain matters. A former member of the Parish Council voices a commonly expressed concern that consultation is ultimately a process in which the villagers put their opinion forward, and the managers proceed with their original plans regardless.

World Heritage and the Avebury Villagers

It was interesting to observe a lack of unsolicited comment on the World Heritage status of Avebury. However, when prompted to discuss World Heritage, most of the villagers I spoke to indicated ambivalence or disregard for the listing. A similar lack of significant meaning in the listing was felt to apply to visitor motivations: that is, the villagers believe that people who choose to visit Avebury do so for reasons other than its international heritage status. Several, however, suggest that foreign tourists may have a greater awareness of Avebury as a World Heritage site than domestic visitors.⁵⁸ The following comments indicate the range of feelings the villagers express in relation to the World Heritage listing:

I don't think this means much to most people ... some think it is more of a nuisance because it brings in more people ... some think there should be a benefit but don't see where this is coming from ... part of the trouble is the

⁵⁷ The Avebury Society was established in the 1980s as the Avebury Civil Society with the intent of protecting the broader interests of the Avebury Parish. It subsequently became focussed on heritage issues. One Avebury resident's summary is: 'I don't like them much. They say a lot but don't do anything ... they are elitist, and the majority are from outside the village'. After attending a meeting and only recognising three other attendees, she notes: 'there were three originals and the rest were clones'. Another resident, who is a member of the Society, expressed her concern that the representatives on the steering committee presented the views of the Executive and not of the broader membership, but she reiterated the importance of retaining any representation that gave voice to the village residents.

⁵⁸ The National Trust and English Heritage management guidelines for the Avebury WHS are guided by a deliberate policy of minimal marketing and exposure. This recognises the fragility of the site faced with the existing visitor volume.

complete mistrust of the Trust and English Heritage ... I don't think that their senior management has any sort of understanding of the villagers. (Former Parish Chair and resident of Little Avebury for over 20 years)

Many of the locals don't care one way or the other about World Heritage ... the big thing is that they don't like all the tourists coming in ... but they don't really worry me ... we travel overseas, and some of the others do, and go and see places so why should we resent people coming to visit Avebury ... many of them [the villagers] moved here recently, knowing the place is like this, so how can they complain? (Resident of Little Avebury for over 40 years)

World Heritage is important ... we should recognise special places but it [Avebury] should be managed better and there should be more money to protect it ... we need to manage tourism better ... preserving things means keeping people off ... the foot and mouth outbreak was good as it gave the place a break. (Resident of Little Avebury, multi-generational)

I don't think many of the villagers are interested in the listing, it's just part of their life ... [they] don't really know what World Heritage listing means ... There was no consultation or any question of soliciting opinion during the nomination process ... lots of locals probably didn't even notice it had taken place. There was a public ceremony to announce it and in my speech I asked that it be remembered that it was a living village and the people should be considered. (Parish chair and resident of Little Avebury)

It's seen as a status symbol and as something that brings in money. (Resident of Big Avebury, multi-generational)

World Heritage leaves the village behind ... it's not meaningful in terms of the people who come here. (Resident of Big Avebury, multi-generational)

The values and meanings that various villagers attribute to the Avebury landscape are clearly more extensive than the significance and values accrued through a globalised heritage discourse. The villagers' notions of being and place are integral to a more local story in which they 'know' their village and the landscape within which it is centred. The nature of the villagers' life world means that the local discourses that emphasise the Avebury landscape as a place of cultural belonging are implicated in broader global structures. However, as the following discussion affirms, the formal acknowledgment of international pre-eminence accrued through World Heritage listing has minimal relevance to the villagers' lived experiences and constructions of place.

The Avebury Village Community

Avebury is a paradox. On one hand Big Avebury has the characteristics of the archetypal English village. It is a small rural community with Saxon roots, with a series of older cottages and residences clustered around the church and lining the main street. The village boasts the ubiquitous pub ('The Red Lion'; plate 6), social centre, Post Office (plate 4), church, school, sports field and general store. On the other hand, the atypical characteristics are manifest in the surrounding Neolithic monuments and the daily influx of thousands of visitors. For the most part the small businesses in the village cater for tourists, as does the one restaurant, Stones (run by the National Trust). And of course there are the two Trust-managed museums. It is also difficult to escape the fact that some of the services, for example the post office (a building also owned by the Trust), are used extensively by visitors and would not otherwise be viable and available for the villagers themselves. Even the village car park (as distinct from the main south-west visitor car park) was built and is owned by the National Trust.

Avebury Trusloe (Little Avebury) is composed of a 1940s council housing estate and a number of characteristically rural cottages. As it lies outside the Avebury henge it is an area less intruded upon by visitors, and maintains a sense of serenity that is no doubt envied by the residents of Big Avebury. The disadvantages, however, are a cause of dissatisfaction for many of the residents of Little Avebury. When the housing estate was established at Trusloe, the new residents, some of them displaced villagers from Big Avebury, were dislocated from their local church, school, shops, post office, pub, shops and garage. Apart from the physical hardships with accessing basic services, this also decreased ease of access to many of the mundane activities implicated in the process of community making: shopping, church services and activities, visiting friends, attending meetings and so on. The vehicle route from Little Avebury to Big Avebury is via the extremely busy A461 (figure 1), which does not have footpath access along its length. There is a more direct route for walkers; however, it is a lengthy hike from one end to the other and not an attractive option in the dark. And the route becomes virtually impassable in wet weather. This leaves the



Plate 5: Avebury High Street, with a megalith in the foreground.



Plate 6: The Avebury pub, 'The Red Lion'.

only on-foot alternative as the potentially hazardous A461. The physical challenges of movement from Little Avebury to Big Avebury are incrementally alleviated for those who live towards the north-east extent of Little Avebury, which lies further from the main road and is an area characterised by older cottages and farms.

The community living at the housing estate appears to be broadly divided into those who come from the Avebury families relocated in the 1940s (many with a multi-generational history of residence), and more recent residents who are provided with council housing on a needs basis. Although some of these families have taken up the opportunity to purchase their homes,⁵⁹ many others move on. As a result there is a relatively fluid residential community. The north-east pocket of Little Avebury shares some characteristics of Big Avebury: the houses are older, some are larger, and have a rural 'cottage' appeal. This 'rural cottage charm' has attracted higher property values, following the increased demand for such homes by city-dwellers seeking the rural experience. Although this is not the place to address the challenges of the urban-led appropriation of the British countryside, it should be noted that Avebury is in this case no different to many other rural villages. The influx of new residents into Avebury, attracted by a change to rural life – and with the financial means to meet increased property values – is not unique to Avebury.⁶⁰ Although some villagers perceive that the new Avebury residents are attracted by the World Heritage status of the surrounding landscape, the changing village demographic is more probably a reflection of the broader movement of people into the rural environment. One view of this fastens attention on the idea of the village as being a place where 'residence' is integrally associated with 'community', and in the more general conceptualisation of 'village' as a product of class thinking (Strathern 1982: 248). This raises broad issues of identity, sense of place and ownership, dispossession and the 'heritagisation' of the rural village environment.⁶¹

⁵⁹ This was a scheme that commenced in the 1980s but disappeared when the municipal housing stock controlled by Kennet District Council transferred to Sarsen Housing Association (Brian Edwards, pers. comm.)

⁶⁰ For a historical perspective of the 'cult of the countryside' see K. Thomas (1996: 243–254).

⁶¹ See discussion of similar issues in East Anglia in Okely (1997).

One impact in Avebury has been the massive increase in property values. It can be argued that the 'beautification' and demolition programs of Keiller and the National Trust have been a contributing factor to the re-creation of Big Avebury as an attractive rural village, most of the 'unsightly' elements having been removed. The result has been that Big Avebury (and parts of Little Avebury) over the past 30 or so years have attracted newcomers who have been in a better financial position to buy property or meet the rising rents imposed by the National Trust. There is a feeling among some of the older residents, and particularly the multi-generational Avebury families now resident in Little Avebury, that this has forced many of the older families out of the village and has negated the chance for any of them to move back into Big Avebury. Apart from the impact this has on expressions of community identity and continuity, it has exacerbated the ambivalent feelings many of the older residents have for the National Trust. The dilemma appears to be the expectation that National Trust decisions about the village should not be entirely predicated on economic factors, but take into account the values and needs of 'the community' – in this case the long-term residents, whose sense of belonging and place are most threatened by changing village demographics. While lifestyle issues such as traffic and visitor impacts are concerns to this group, the single most identified worry is that their community identity is being eroded, and that this sense of belonging to a group, and belonging to a place, will not be available for their children to experience.

Who 'Owns' Avebury?

There is an uneasy relationship between the villagers and the National Trust. While this is not the place to discuss strategies of resolution, it is worth addressing the genesis of this feeling in terms of perceptions of ownership. The question of ownership is important, integral to the conflict between understandings of legal or economic ownership and 'conceptual' ownership, where the latter arises from a relationship based on belonging, use, access and practice. That is, by asserting a place is 'mine', I do so through the creation of a meaningful attachment, while acknowledging that I do not have legal title (also see Chapter 6):

It is not a matter of feeling at ease in a given place but of feeling at ease in a place that has become *one's own* in some especially significant way. "One's own" does not imply possession in any literal sense; it is more deeply a question of *appropriating*, with all that this connotes of *making something one's own by making it one with one's ongoing life*. (Casey 1987: 191–192; emphasis in original)

For example, the Avebury sports field was suggested by several villagers as a 'special village place', one to which the community strongly expressed a community claim. Interestingly enough, it seems that the villagers themselves do not use it much, other than the village cricket club (whose Captain and Secretary are not Avebury residents) and the boules club. The attachment is more one of 'rightful possession', based on an unkept promise by Alexander Keiller to give the land of the sports field to the villagers. This never eventuated and the land is now owned by the National Trust and rented to the village. One Little Avebury resident explains that despite two meetings to discuss the future of the sports facility 'there remains a strong opposition to giving it back to the Trust'. She attributes this to a dislike and distrust of the Trust, and that 'there is a sense of ownership, particularly by the old villagers'. Another also noted that a motive was the understanding of the field as a community venue and the determination to not let it 'go back to the control of the National Trust ... the locals feel the Trust wants to own everything and that they have very little interest in the community or its needs'.

A village 'outsider', an ex-resident who lives in nearby Swindon but continues to work in the village, commented that the Avebury villagers 'seem to be very interested in everything that the National Trust wants to do ... they are very wary of [the Trust] ... it seems to serve to unite them'. Several employees of the Trust believe that this wariness is a redirected expression of the naturally occurring 'landlord' mistrust inherent in the tenant/landlord relationship: 'if it wasn't us it would be someone else and it naturally comes with "enemy territory"'. In some respects, the nature of the National Trust's ownership is indeed little different to that of landlords in the previous few centuries. The Trust retains fiduciary and management rights that take priority over the tenancy rights of many villagers. This creates an ambiguity in terms of their relationship with the villagers, and arguably in relationship to their principal custodial responsibility for the Neolithic monuments. However, in respect of their relationship

with Avebury residents, conventional management practices based on economic returns and asset protection are at times in conflict with local community concerns, attachments and values. The challenges this imposes on the relationship between the Trust and the villagers are complex.

Through its management plan, the Trust reiterates its commitment to the present community and its intent, wherever possible, to protect their interests. However, it has other obligations that are potentially conflicting: first, as asset manager to protect the interests of the National Trust; second, as heritage manager to protect the archaeological heritage values of the site. Balancing village needs, asset responsibilities and heritage management is not easy. Comments from community members suggest a perception that the only goal the Trust achieves efficiently is meeting domestic Trust priorities – that the monument protection comes second, and the villagers a poor third. Although there are concerns about the National Trust's lack of attention to contemporary community interests, a number of villagers are critical of the Trust's current efforts in protecting the stones and the various other attributes of the site. Comments such as the following are not uncommon: 'There appears to be a lack of input by the managers into rectifying the damage and managing the monument properly. Perhaps there is a conflict between the National Trust and English Heritage and who pays for what?' (Big Avebury High Street resident of 20 years).

The distrust of the National Trust by a portion of the community was reiterated by the Chair of the Parish Council at a meeting of the TVM Subgroup (12/12/01). The dilemma is exemplified by assertions such as that made by a Trust representative at the same meeting that the village car park, a place perceived by the villagers as part of 'their' lived environment, was built and is owned by the Trust and only available to the villagers by the grace of that organisation. The status of 'Trust as Owner' is supported in the public arena: for example, the tourist brochure produced by the Kennet District Council subtitled the heading 'Avebury' with the wording 'a Property of the National Trust' (Tourism Unit, Kennet District Council, n.d.). Although this may be technically true, at least for a portion of the Avebury landscape, the terminology raises the now often repeated query – 'who does own the past'?

The majority of the farmland owned by the National Trust is under lease as full agricultural tenancies of arable land. The community expresses a general concern that there is a 'plot' by the Trust to return the surrounding agricultural landscape to one of natural grasslands ('a giant lawn' in one resident's description). This is probably a valid concern, given that the 'Preservation of Archaeological and Historic Features: Objective A' includes the intent 'to halt the degradation of the prehistoric field systems and other buried sites currently under arable cropping' with a defined strategy (A.8): 'To restore to a stable regime of grassland management of archaeological features at present subjected to ploughing or other avoidable erosion' (National Trust 1997: 9–10). This is echoed in similar strategies contained within the English Heritage WHS plan, which also identify the enhancement of nature conservation values incumbent in expanding the grassland areas (see English Heritage 1998: 84–85, 91).

From the point of view of some residents, this is a 'false' action as 'there has always been agriculture on the place and this [grassland policy] is creating a false past'. In response to a 1995 draft of the Trust Property Management Plan : '...the villagers argued strongly against the introduction of extensive areas of grassland, involving a major change in farming practice. The people who live in Avebury like to see the changing seasons reflected in the cornfields and the wildlife they harbour; they do not want to be surrounded by a landscape 'fossilised' as an 'appropriate setting' for the monuments' (Fielden 1996: 4). Another Big Avebury villager, a second generation farmer, and his wife see themselves implicated in a fight for the idea of living in 'the country', and not a park:

There will be pressure on farmers given the current economic constraints, some will go with the flow and become heritage 'commercial' under pressure from the Trust to become grasslands ... but the more economic route the National Trust takes, the less protection is given to the place.

This concern to protect the rural landscape is expressed by a number of residents and farmers who legitimate their interests and concerns for the Avebury environment through 'use and practice' responsibilities to the community and the land and more general notions of guardianship.

The disquiet relates to broader issues than the livelihood of individual farmers. The rural landscape, itself hundreds of years old, is imbued with multi-generational understandings of 'being' in Avebury, where identity has been asserted and reinforced in local discourses of rurality and a reliance on the land. Until early last century many of the villagers were inculcated in a way of life that revolved around agricultural pursuits, and the concomitant traditions and practices through which the community – at the village level – reasserted and reinforced a sense of being, of communality or of 'villagehood', and of place. This history, and the shared memories and narratives of the more recent past, are embedded in the spatial ordering of the rural landscape. In this landscape, the Neolithic elements are physical embellishments that complement other naturally intrusive features, centred around the tangible elements of the village. The visible systems of land use, and the spatial organisation of people, village and landscape, reflect a dynamic interaction with the land, in which underlying social and cultural structures and discourses are as significant as broader heritage and economic pressures. The landscape as experienced, practiced, lived, conceived and remembered serves as an active medium through which society is reproduced and Avebury is emphasised as a place of cultural belonging.

This is not to suppose that the rural landscape itself is immutable (see in particular Hoskins 1975), but to reinforce the crucial role it has played and continues to play in the construction of contemporary village identity. It also emphasises the processes of attachment, belonging and ownership that serve to centre the lived 'place' of Avebury. From the perspective of the villagers who have grown up in Avebury, the physical features that have attracted attention and 'value' within a national and global heritage discourse are inseparable from local histories and myths, experiences and attachments. These narratives and social memories reinforce the belonging obtained through collective experience. How these attachments can be threatened by processes that marginalise and trivialise local narratives is explored in the discussion of the Great Barn Museum in the following chapter.

The Villagers' Avebury

A woman from Little Avebury, who has lived in the village for 30 years, notes that one of the problems with living in a 'heritage village' is the constant war between the

archaeological establishment and the village: '[the archaeologists] want to wrap it in cotton-wool, but part of its charm is that it's a village and not a prehistoric site'. She acknowledges, however, that there is satisfaction in knowing that the area is protected and its heritage status will prevent further development. Her concern is that this does not necessarily translate into a protection for the cottages in the village. She believes the villagers have pride in the physical 'shape' of the village, and by this she means the combined effect of the village buildings and 'the ring'.

The long-term villagers express a strong feeling of commitment to the village and the community:

The monuments are important but so is the village! We played on the stones when we were kids ... they were always there ... there's never a dull moment, especially lots going on among the stones ... everyone who has left here has always hankered to come back ... there is a real community spirit ... part of village life, everyone used to help each other ... there was a sense of sharing and this was how the community built up a strong relationship ... we have roots here, it is home. (Multi-generational resident of Big Avebury)

There is something special about the openness of the land and the freshness ... home is the church clock striking. (Multi-generational resident of Big Avebury)

I love the place ... my roots are here ... you've got to keep struggling on and keep some sort of community ... if I left I'd miss the people the most, people who know you, and just the whole place – it is somewhere where you know you are home – 'Good Old Avebury' is a place to come back to. (Multi-generational resident of Little Avebury)

This is NOT a 'National Trust' village as there are still many privately owned houses ... I love it here, the people are lovely and friendly ... you know people ... I would like my children to experience the same community spirit and to see the village school and village shop stay. (Resident for 30 years, married to second generation Avebury villager)

It's the diverse community that makes it good ... it is important because it is an ongoing community in an ancient place ... the archaeology is important but not to Avebury people per se ... it is a community of people, the importance is the community ... the prehistory is important, but if you pulled the village down we'd be up in arms ... (Little Avebury resident of 25 years)

Apart from the sports field mentioned above, villagers identify a number of places that the community 'feels strongly about': the working man's club, the church, the village hall. The village hall is the hub of community activity, being the venue for parish meetings and various other gatherings such as meetings of the Women's Auxiliary and the playgroup:

The hall is fine but a bit small ... it is well used and now the centre [of the village community] thanks to the hard work of a small hard core of good people – there was an opportunity to demolish the school and erect a new and bigger village hall on the sports field but the villagers voted to keep the school ... [the hall] is probably the centre of village community life more than the church ... before Keiller it was at the top of the street but not many community meetings were held there ... one place for everyone to get together and hold meetings was at the back of the pub, before it was taken over by the brewer. (Multi-generational resident of Little Avebury)

We are interested in protecting the community shop, the pub, the club environment, the church, the village hall, the sports field ... and friendships. (Multi-generational resident of Big Avebury)

The sense of belonging to a community, and having knowledge of that community, is important to the villagers. This knowledge is reinforced through village gatherings and events, whether formal or informal, so it is not surprising that the places the villagers identify as important to them are loci of such activities: the hall, the school, the church, the pub. Integral to community is the notion of local knowledge and know-how, and an understanding of the processes that allow transmission and diversification of knowledge and practice. This local knowledge can grow with longevity of association with a place, and by what Hummon (1992: 237) refers to as a saturation of the local community environment with 'memories of significant life experiences'. He further notes that ties to local places are more greatly and consistently enhanced through community social involvement, whether through kinship, membership of organisations, or simply local shopping. There is an 'insidedness' of communities that is

... at once physical, social, and autobiographical – of living within a known terrain; within an order of community life; within a landscape of remembered events. Ironically, this fundamental identification with locale is largely taken for granted and unconscious. (Hummon 1992: 258)

A 'Place' for Visitors

The National Trust and the villagers have, however, established one fertile plot of common ground. The Trust and the community share a desire to curtail visitor growth: both groups are concerned with the detrimental impact to the site through erosion and over-visitation, and the community more emphatically because of the threat to their quality of life. One resident of Little Avebury summed it up by saying: 'they create clutter, litter and erosion ... it is bedlam'. The paradox is that the peace and quiet is not only an attraction to the villagers, but also to many who visit the place, often on a regular basis.

The number of people visiting the village and the henge is an issue. Vandalism aside, there is the universal conundrum with similar heritage places of balancing experience with the impact of the presence of multiple people. Avebury attracts an eclectic range of visitors, however, and the villagers express particular concern about the influx of certain groups, for example bikers and 'hippies' who are perceived to have little concern for private property or intrusion on other people's serenity. One villager's pithy description of 'tourist time' is as the 'I love the smell of marijuana in the morning' time:

After the summer solstice last year we had hundreds of people ... there was madness with parking, drumming, viewers, and one of the quadrants was used as a public toilet ... the current group of people living in the henge is appalling and very bad for the heritage site ... they remove branches and trees and create litter ... there should be better protection ... the Wednesday night bikers [who come to the pub] are a nightmare⁶² ... up to 600 some nights ... the pub is now a tourist place, not a community place – there's a manager not a landlord ... you can say or do anything and not get evicted, only a few locals go there now. (Multi-generational resident of Little Avebury)

The appropriation of the pub by visitors, whether bikers, hippies or tourists, has led to its disenfranchisement by some as a community venue:

The pub was once a community pub ... there are still a few locals there now, but mostly the young ones. It's poorly managed and encourages bike riders and hippies without throwing misbehavers out. [The locals] go down to the Wagon

⁶² The Red Lion has become a regular weekly meeting venue for a group of local motorbike riders. The attraction appears to be the pub and its central location and accessibility, and has nothing to do with Avebury as a heritage site.

& Horses but not this pub ... many of the locals go to the pubs in the other villages ... or to the Avebury Working Man's club.

Not all visitors, however, are seen in this light. A number of villagers have indicated their own love for the open landscape and the aesthetic appeal of a walk around the henge and its surroundings. They acknowledge this also makes it a major attraction for local visitors, many of whom come to walk the dog or bring their children for a play. As a Little Avebury resident notes, many visitors come from nearby Swindon, simply because of 'the airspace – they come for the open space and the fresh air, and the great landscapes and big skies ... there are good footpaths, lots of walkers and horses'. Another remarked that she often bumps into people from nearby Swindon and Wilbury while on her own walks, and that she is 'always meeting people who've been coming for ages and keep coming back'.⁶³ While staying in the nearby town of Warminster I would sometimes introduce into conversation a query about Avebury: the common response was a memory of a place that the person was taken to as a child, often more than once. A resident of Swindon, who has lived and worked in Avebury, observed:

I used to come and walk around the area ... there were certainly a lot of regulars, including people who came down from London, and lots from Swindon ... maybe it's a case of 'the weather is nice – let's go to Avebury' ... I couldn't say what it is about the place, particularly walking around the henge and being away from the village ... some of the visitors from Swindon come twice a week ... I wouldn't say that many had a huge interest in the archaeology ... I don't wonder about the age of the stones, and it doesn't awe me, I come for the green areas and the attractive landscape with the other natural features around ... but it is part of our heritage, and even part of being British ... a very different experience to going to Stonehenge.

In such expressions, it is evident that a community-based construction of Avebury as a heritage site includes the experience of the broader sensual and aesthetic landscape where its natural features are part of a quintessentially 'British' experience of the rural

⁶³ This demographic is one that challenges National Trust plans to charge for the main visitor car park. While on one hand there is valid need to raise funds, and 'user pays' seems fair for those who are coming to visit the 'monument'. But many locals are regular visitors who drive over to take advantage of a pleasant walking venue.

environment. Another resident of a nearby town, who is an archaeologist, expresses his pleasure in the ambience:

I used to take my kids to Avebury ... memories of rolling easter eggs down the slopes of the henge of Easter Sunday ... they are now adults and they take their friends there today ... I like that the large stones can be sat in as chairs, that it is free ... we always take our visitors to see it ... the problem today is that it is presented in a 'National Trust' way – you can't actually 'use' the place or slide any more.

Pitts (2001: 178) discusses the discrepancy between these views and the way archaeologists and the site managers describe the ancient monuments through plans – which are views that would never have been experienced by people in the past. The experiences of modern day visitors who wander around the site allow them to construct a personal and idiosyncratic perspective of a complex three-dimensional place: this includes smells, sound, movement and touch. Although this engagement with the landscape of Avebury is likely to be more reminiscent of the general experience of the place in prehistoric times, the differences between contemporary and prehistoric experiences would be vast.

Experience of a place can act to transform the local landscape, imbuing it with personal meaning and significance through life experiences. The local landscape becomes a symbolic extension of the self, acting dialectically to create a relationship between people and place (Hummon 1992: 258; Tilley 1994: 26). In this way, the identity of members of a community can be reaffirmed and reproduced in regular activities, rituals, stories and the meanings of a landscape that give rise to a sense of belonging and familiarity. Unfortunately, the separation of modes of experience has now been imposed in the life times of the older villagers. Different spatial orders (including prohibitions of access) have been introduced that create a greater segregation between the village and the henge and stone circles. The implication is that their children are unlikely to enjoy the same embodied experiences that saturate the stones with local meanings and allow them to act as mnemonic markers in the landscape.

Casey (1987: 141) distinguishes mnemonic modes as different forms of recollection, (reminding, reminiscing, and recognising), as well as 'body memory' and 'place memory', which are 'beyond the confinement of the mind considered as the exclusive receptacle of remembering'. These are processes that act to form contemporary perceptions of place, but root them in the past – in this way the past is transformed and recreated in the present. 'Our experience of the present is embedded in past experience. Memory represents the past and the present as connected to each other, and consistent with each other' (Fentress & Wickham 1992: 24). However, the accuracy of our knowledge of the past and present is reliant on the accuracy of ideas and recollections that exist in the present mind. Memory is a complex phenomenon, that involves sights, smells and other sensory experiences. It is a representation and interpretation of the past that is simultaneously a process of self-construction in which personal experiences mesh with public events (J. Thomas 1999: 52–53). The value of memory is not that it can provide an unshakeable foundation of knowledge but 'its capacity to keep us afloat', which takes on greater import in times of change.

Although 'free' access continues to be available, the stones and other monuments have been subject to a process of 'heritagisation'. In accruing significance as artefacts they are likely to become dislocated from the web of meanings and understandings that bind them to a landscape of embodied experience. The playgrounds, slides and seats of the past generation are now formally labelled as 'Neolithic megaliths', and in being so named and understood – and moved from tactile experience – they have become objectified and 'made solid', symbolising an appropriation and fetishisation of parts of the village landscape by heritage interests. The consequence is a muting of the multiple local stories that have surrounded the stones since the passing of their Neolithic creators. What were 'our stones' are now the National Trust's and everybody else's. Rowland (1994: 136) observes that 'heritage ... has diversionary potential in the sense that the aim is to substitute the promotion of local identity for active engagement in national politics ... the past as property means ownership of what constitutes unity and a chosen sense of place'. At Avebury, local identity, belonging and notions of conceptual ownership are clearly in danger of such a subsumption and marginalisation by a 'sense of place' that has been manufactured by archaeological appropriations of the landscape.

Conclusion

From the 17th century, the structural components that make up the village of Avebury have been variously condemned as unattractive or as a sort of parasitic growth that is strangling the monuments: 'the Avebury monuments are adjacent to and entangled with an English village, and the relationships between the two have tended not to be good for antiquity' (Ucko et al. 1991: 2). Burl (1979: 15) asserts that despite claims to the contrary – and despite decades of 'beautification' works by the combined forces of Keiller and the National Trust – 'Avebury is not a particularly attractive village':

Walking in from the east one is soon aware of this bustle, an irritation which the first houses do not assuage. Once past the bank and the massive, prostrate stone there is little sign that this is one of the most intriguing prehistoric temples in the British Isles. Instead, one sees a dirty brick cottage with a rusting lean-to shed, another with weather stained stucco, a gap, a barn, a fallen sarsen, a final stone-built cottage by the site of the Old Catherine Wheel Inn, where Stukeley stayed in his earlier visits.

Following 25 years of village modifications, Burl would probably temper his criticism. Attempts to tidy up the village to make it worthy of its more ancient magnificence are still active. The Avebury club house, for example, has been identified as intrusive to the visual character of its surrounds. English Heritage has mooted that it be moved to a 'less sensitive' location, after making 'suitable financial arrangement' with the village community (English Heritage 1998: 87). The challenge is to overcome a history of negative reaction to the village, and to then create an environment of understanding that ceases to treat the future of the village and its occupants and the future of the monuments as a contest. It is also necessary to avoid an approach to conserving the character of the village that relies on the maintenance of another cultural artefact: that of the physical village as a quintessential example of British rural 'villagedom'. While this situation remains, management decisions are likely to continue to be perceived as ill-judged, simply because they are inculcated in an ongoing power contest that is inseparable from constructions of identity and belonging.

It seems fitting to conclude with the words of an archaeologist with over 40 year's experience of Avebury. For Peter Fowler the vital dimension of Avebury lies in the relationship between the village and the 'stones', not in antiquity as such:

... surely the story of the place is now rather about their dynamic interaction than merely about celebrating a moderately pretty village and an old monument. Our reverence for 'the Stones', we should recall, is a Restoration revival barely 350 years old of something 'forgotten' for perhaps two millennia; yet the story of the interaction, although fitfully in evidence, went on, as it still does today. Avebury is about an interesting relationship, fixed in that place, long-expressed in that place, and crucial to the future of that place. Appreciation of the dynamics of this relationship, as those involved are well aware, is going to be vital. (Fowler 1995: 3)

Equally vital is an understanding of the tensions engendered by multiple interpretations of the Avebury landscape, and the potential for the more powerful discourse of heritage to subsume the equally important but more ordinary and subtle elements of the landscape. The multiple roles of actors are considered in the following chapter through an exploration of village understandings of Avebury, expressed in response to a series of challenges to Avebury's construction as a place of heritage significance.