

ARCHAEOLOGY SERVICE

WELCOME TO THE ARCHAEOLOGY SERVICE'S ANNUAL NEWSLETTER for 2026

Welcome to the Archaeology Service's annual newsletter for 2026. Our newsletter presents some of the more notable and interesting archaeological discoveries and stories in Wiltshire and Swindon over the last 18 months, largely resulting from the advice or input of members of the Archaeology Service, who act as archaeological advisors to Wiltshire Council and Swindon Borough Council. Our newsletter includes items on an early medieval hoard found in west Wiltshire, an Iron Age/Roman settlement at Beanacre, Melksham, and two newly scheduled monument sites. We hope these and other articles within the newsletter are of interest. If you would like to contact the Archaeology Service, you can email us at archaeology@wiltshire.gov.uk

The Archaeology Service also takes part in the annual Heritage Open Days festival, along with our colleagues at the Wiltshire & Swindon History Centre in Chippenham. The History Centre will be celebrating the event on the 16th and 17th of September, the theme being 'Everyday Histories', with experts from the Wiltshire Family History Society on hand and tours of archive strong rooms and conservation labs. The Archaeology Service will host a drop-in day on the 16th of September, including exhibitions, demonstrations of the HER, handling archaeological artefacts and a guided walk around historic Chippenham. Booking is required for the general History Centre events at archives@wiltshire.gov.uk and for the Chippenham guided walk at archaeology@wiltshire.gov.uk and all the events are free.

We also have an HER website which is a simplified version of our internal HER data and uses point data location for each monument at [Archaeology and historic environment record - Wiltshire Council](#). Do read our article within this newsletter describing the history of HERs and details of two new promotional films released this year by Historic England, showcasing the scope and variety of work HERs are involved in.



Heritage walk at Battlesbury Camp.
© Wiltshire Council

You can also join us on one of our heritage walks, which we undertake every year. Last September we took a group around Barbury Castle and in previous years have explored the hillforts of Battlesbury and Oldbury, learnt about the archaeology and history of settlements such as Market Lavington and Sherston, studied the architectural history of Lacock and Warminster with our Wiltshire Buildings Record colleagues and walked within the magnificent World Heritage Site landscapes of Avebury and Stonehenge. Details of our walks for 2026 can be found on the events page of the History Centre at [Events - Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre](#).



Members of the Archaeology Service discovering an appropriately themed mini golf course.
© Wiltshire Council



Images from a film about Historic Environment Records.
© Historic England

AN EARLY MEDIEVAL GOLD AND GARNET HOARD FROM WEST WILTSHIRE

In January 2025, two responsible metal detectorists, whilst on a commercial metal detecting rally in west Wiltshire, found a flattened gold and garnet ring and a beautiful gold, silver, garnet and ivory stylised bird's head, possibly a helmet fitting or the terminal from a drinking horn, from within the plough soil.

The organisers stopped the rally and contacted Sophie Hawke, Wiltshire Finds Liaison Officer (FLO), who visited the site that same afternoon. She confirmed the finds were early medieval, probably early to mid-seventh century, and of precious metal, so were therefore potential Treasure items.



Gold, silver, garnet and ivory bird's head.
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Subsequent controlled metal detecting of the plough soil by the detectorists, alongside test pitting by the FLO team, has led to further gold and garnet finds. Geophysical surveys carried out by Archaeological Surveys Ltd and Mike McQueen around the area of the finds have helped to discover a previously unknown multi-period site dating back to the Bronze Age.

There has been great co-operation between the landowners, detectorists, Wiltshire Council, Cardiff University and the PAS (Portable Antiquities Scheme). A detailed report of results from the April 2026 excavation will be sent to the Archaeology service in due course.

The scattered hoard was showcased as one of three major finds during the PAS Annual Treasure Report launch in January 2026 at the British Museum and has been designated as nationally important. For the full record of the hoard see the PAS database [Record ID: WILT-113D1C - EARLY MEDIEVAL hoard](#)

According to the British Museum, 2026 was the third record-breaking year in a row for reported finds to PAS and for Treasure cases. The majority of finds are made by responsible metal detectorists who work according to the Treasure Act of 1996. Further information on legal obligations of finders, as well as advice and a code of practice and relevant contact details can be found on the PAS website <https://finds.org.uk/treasure>.

A few of the other important PAS finds recorded by FLO Sophie Hawkes can be seen in this newsletter.



Gold and garnet ring.
© Creative Commons



Polychrome mosaic with later circular stone platform. reproduced by kind permission of Ruth Corney

We are very pleased to have, since the last newsletter, two new additions to add to Wiltshire's impressive list of 1360 Scheduled Monuments. They are Bradford-on-Avon Roman Villa and Badbury Wick Medieval Settlement.

Scheduling is our oldest form of heritage protection beginning in 1913, although its roots go back as the 1882 Ancient Monuments Protection Act.

Bradford-on-Avon Roman Villa

During dry weather in 1999, a villa complex showed clearly as parch marks on aerial photographs in the playing fields of St. Laurence's School, Bradford-on-Avon. An earlier excavation in 1976 had found the remains of a Romano-British bath-suite and adjacent outhouses, and the presence of a villa had long been suspected. Subsequent geophysical survey and excavations revealed the existence of two aligned villa buildings, identical in plan but evidently different in their use.

One is a conventionally splendid Romano British villa, with beautiful mosaic work including a central rosette and knot motif in the central room, and painted wall plaster, whilst the other has no evidence of interior decoration and is believed to have had agri-industrial functions, with evidence for a smokehouse and a large double-flue drier or malting kiln as being part of the original construction.

The villa dates from the mid-to late C3, with a major phase of rebuilding and refurbishment in the mid-C4 that included the addition of the mosaic within the house. A major discovery from the excavation was a circular stone platform, found in the mosaic room and edged with dressed limestone blocks, of late C4 or early C5 origin. Although the font is now absent, the platform, central circular setting and the adjacent soakaway pit strongly supports an interpretation of a baptistery. Therefore, the dominant position within the villa, and the worn character of the threshold – showing prolonged use by many feet – gives evidence for the conversion of the villa into a possible Christian centre in fifth century Britain.

Bradford-on-Avon Roman Villa was scheduled in February 2026.

Scheduled Monument area with associated Medieval Settlement, Badbury Wick.

© Wiltshire Council

TWO NEW SCHEDULED MONUMENTS FOR WILTSHIRE AND SWINDON

Badbury Wick Medieval Settlement

Medieval rural settlements in England typically comprised of a small group of houses, gardens, yards, streets, paddocks, sometimes with a green, a manor and a church. Although the sites of many of these villages have been occupied continuously to the present day, many others declined in size, particularly during the C14 and C15. The reasons for a contraction or desertion of a village are varied but often reflected declining economic viability, changes in land use such as enclosure or emparkment, or population fluctuations due to widespread epidemics such as the Black Death.

Badbury Wick is a medieval settlement known historically as Baddenham Wyke and first recorded in 1425. However, the medieval settlement has C11 origins and appears to have developed further in the C13 following the construction of a complex of buildings, probably a manor site, to the north-east. A measured survey in 2004 revealed earthwork platforms, holloways, a complex of ditches, substantial scarps and broad ridge and furrow, interpreted as features associated with settlement and the remains of cultivation. The northern block of earthworks represents a regular, possibly planned layout of properties, served by a major holloway providing access to open fields. The central part of the settlement is still occupied by a number of properties, including Badbury Wick House. Near the pond (a possible fishpond) adjacent to the main drive, a substantial series of scarps appear to be defining three sides of a rectangular enclosure, bearing resemblance to a moat. The southern block of settlement earthworks form a series of well-defined platforms, two of which are of substantial proportions. A large ditch marks the southern limit of the settlement and serves as a holloway. The character of the southern settlement is markedly regular and suggests an element of planning.

The archaeological evidence indicates that the settlement of Badbury Wick declined from the C14, although some occupation continued beyond this date.

Badbury Wick Medieval Settlement was scheduled in June 2026.



A large group of archaeologists have been excavating and making exciting discoveries this summer in a field in the rural area of Bowerchalke, south of Salisbury. The Teffont Archaeology Group, under the direction of Dr David Roberts of Cardiff University, has used up to 80 archaeologists, including volunteers and students, to undertake a large area excavation of a Roman corridor villa first discovered six years ago.

The site, known as Garson's Field, has been investigated and surveyed since 2020, and the first phase of excavation, which took place in 2024, revealed Roman buildings with in-situ mosaic pavements, a large barn building, and areas of Roman concrete. The 2026 excavation has revealed more walls of Roman buildings, many of which have been sadly 'robbed' out in the post Roman period, making it more difficult for archaeologists to decipher. More mosaic pavements and Roman concrete have been discovered, and evidence of Roman under-floor heating systems (hypocaust) and wall plaster confirms the high status of the buildings and the affluence of its occupants two thousand years ago.

A COMPLEX SEQUENCE OF ROMAN BUILDINGS EXCAVATED AT BOWERCHALKE



Drone shot of Garson's Field Roman villa.
© Mike McQueen

The project met its objectives to better understand the preservation and significance of the Roman villa and its associated features and has helped to shed light on the nature of Roman rural settlement in this quieter corner of Wiltshire. We can't wait for the report and publication of the findings of this excavation which will come out in the next year or so.



Excavation Director Dr David Roberts, with Cllr Paul Sample, Neil Adam and Melanie Pomeroy-Kellinger from Wiltshire Council. The remains of a Roman building can be seen in the background of the photo, taken during a site visit on 12th August 2026.
© Wiltshire Archaeology Service

ROMANESQUE CARVINGS AT 20 LONG STREET, DEVIZES



Carvings in cellar of 20 Long Street, Devizes.
© Wiltshire Buildings Record

Interest in this fascinating discovery was recently revived due to Wiltshire Buildings Records (WBR) ongoing work in Devizes. Wiltshire Buildings Record has been recording built heritage since 1979, with over 18,000 records of individual buildings and dateable features, providing an understanding of the built environment in Wiltshire and surrounding areas.

20 Long Street is a three-storey house, looking innocently late Georgian in date, with window tax-beating paired sashes to the upper floors (if two windows were less than a foot apart, they were taxed as one). It is one of those peculiar configurations that saw timber-framing constructed over ground floor masonry. These were prevalent for a short time in the 17th and early 18th centuries in areas of Wiltshire around Devizes. At No.20 the timber-framed upper storeys were added to a 16th century low stone range as an adaption. However, this was only one of the remarkable features present, the interior having been discovered to be constructed of very early reclaimed stone.

Spolia (Latin for 'spoils') refers to stone taken from an existing structure and repurposed for new buildings or decorative use. This ancient practice involves reclaiming stone that has already been quarried,

cut, and built into earlier structures. Historically, material reuse has been widespread across Europe and, in the UK, largely associated with ecclesiastical buildings and monuments. 20 Long Street might be an example of this recycling.

Pam Slocombe, founder of the WBR in 1979, visited the house in 1983/1984 and reported on its unusual construction, the upper timber-framed floor once being clad in thin stone slabs. She noted the reused stone blocks with Romanesque carving in the fireplace, cellar and walls and speculated the obvious possibility that these had come from either Devizes Castle or St John's Church. The medieval castle was ordered to be 'slighted', (the deliberate damage of a high-status building to reduce its value), after the Civil War and this was completed by 1648. The stone was subsequently used for local buildings. St. John's Church, built c1120, was heavily restored throughout the 18th and 19th centuries and original stone may have been reused, again for local buildings.

Not all the reused blocks in Long Street were carved, but they were of the same type and size, suggesting wholesale reuse.

It is not known if other cellars in Long Street, or elsewhere in Devizes also hide similar secrets, but it is suspected. Further discoveries might throw more light on the evolution of the Devizes Castle site.



Re-used moulded stone in a side wall, 20 Long Street, Devizes.
© Wiltshire Buildings Record

IRON AGE SETTLEMENTS AND A ROMANO-BRITISH TOWN AT WICK FARM, BEANACRE

Full details of the results of the fieldwork will not be known for some time as the post-excavation stage of the investigations is currently underway, however a general pattern has emerged.

Area 4, the first site to be investigated uncovered the remains of three roundhouses dating from the Iron Age/Roman period crossover. These structures did not appear to have been used for domestic settlement, but there was evidence for some limited form of processing. They were later overlain by the ditches of Romano-British field systems. The whole site was later partially covered with substantial spreads of occupation debris which appeared to have been transported from higher ground to the north-west by means of soil creep.

Area 3 exposed a similar sequence of activity, although only a single round house was recorded here, and no occupation layers were noted.

Area 2 contained the same sequence, but with multi-phase round houses, which were then superseded by field systems.

Area 1 contained two phases of round houses followed by field systems, along with evidence for some areas of hard standing around one of the houses and with large pits created for quarrying limestone on the northern edge of the site.

The geophysical survey supported the earlier evidence of the Romano-British roadside town uncovered by Wessex Archaeology in 2015 during excavation of a cable trench following the line of the railway line, and directly to the west. The recent excavations, however, uncovered concrete evidence of the continuity of settlement from the later prehistoric to the Roman period.



Areas 2 and 3 under investigation at Wick Farm, Beanacre
© Cotswold Archaeology

A planning application for a solar farm was presented to Wiltshire Council in March 2020. Due to the large scale of this proposal and the known archaeological potential of the area, which included later prehistoric and Romano-British activity, Wiltshire Council's Archaeology Service requested that a geophysical survey be carried out across the development footprint.

This survey uncovered a landscape of archaeological activity, including a roadside Romano-British small town straddling the line of the former Silchester to Bath Roman Road, along with four apparent later prehistoric/Romano-British settlements to the north. The geophysical survey was followed up by trial trenching that confirmed the presence of the Roman town and the 'native' settlements.

Following discussion between the Archaeology Service, the developer and their archaeological consultant, the Roman town was scoped out of the proposed development, so that no further work was required. The four small settlements to the north remained within the proposal footprint and were subsequently identified for further investigation. As a result, four open area excavations were carried out over the late spring and summer of 2023.



Cropmarks of Iron Age settlement features and a later Romano-British field system in Area 2 at Wick Farm, Beanacre
© Cotswold Archaeology

SHOWCASING HERs!

In 2023, the Government's Levelling Up and Regeneration Act established Historic Environment Records (HERs) as a statutory requirement for Local Authorities, meaning that every Local Authority must maintain an HER as a primary source of information for planning and land management. However, HERs are an important starting point for anyone interested in the archaeology, built heritage, and history of an area. Wiltshire and Swindon have been fortunate to have had a local authority managed HER since c.1981.

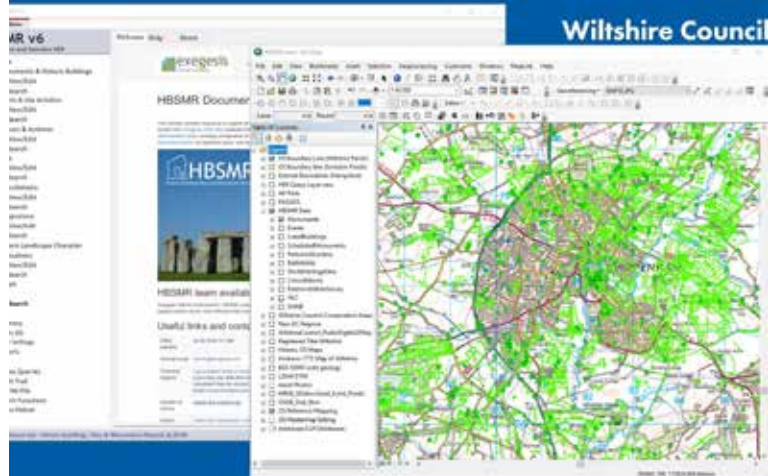
An inventory of archaeological and historic monuments was first created by the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England (RCHME) in 1908. A card index system was originally compiled from the mapping of antiquities on OS maps by OGS Crawford, for example.



County Council Sites & Monument Records (SMRs) began in the 1960s as a series of record cards,



then as a paper-based database, gradually computerised from the 1980s and funded by the Department of Environment/English Heritage - we found several massive bound volumes of dot-matrix printed records during our recent office move.



All images © Wiltshire Council

This digital system evolved to utilise Microsoft Office and AutoCAD in the early 2000s and now has an integrated GIS electronic map (Global Information System).

The Monument records in our HER system are available to search on our Wiltshire and Swindon HER website:

<https://services.wiltshire.gov.uk/HistoryEnvRecord/Home/Index>

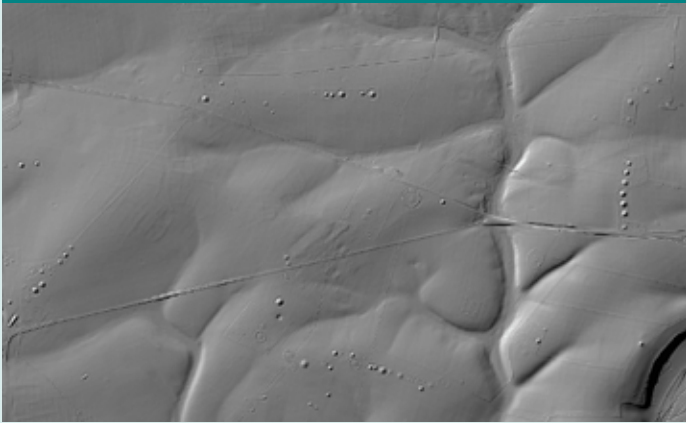
To celebrate the Government's recognition of the importance of HERs and showcase the whole range of information that HERs hold across the England, Historic England have produced two short films in March 2026: 'What are Historic Environment Records?' and 'Why Historic Environment Records Matter'. Colleagues from various authorities feature in the second film - Why Historic Environment Records Matter - demonstrating the extensive capabilities and the range of HERs across the country, and including some fantastic shots of historic landscapes, structures and buildings! These passionate HER champions emphasise the importance and wide use of HERs in environmental, climate change and community projects, as well as for town planning and housing developments.

Not all HERs have the functionality or range of use demonstrated in the films, but we're all working hard to record and improve on what we already know about our local historic environment to make our HERs better, within the budget constraints of local authorities.

Of course, we want you to explore our Wiltshire and Swindon HER but if you'd like to look further afield, Historic England also host Heritage Gateway, which Wiltshire & Swindon joined in 2022.
<https://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/gateway/default.aspx>

Heritage Gateway allows you to search over 60 resources, including other local authority, Historic England and National Trust records. It's looking rather dated now, but Historic England are in the process of developing a new look site, which is due to launch later this year. We'll let you know when it's ready.... In the meantime, happy HER hunting!

SETTING OF STONEHENGE AND AVEBURY WORLD HERITAGE SITE



LiDAR image of Stonehenge landscape showing topographical features and monuments such as barrows
© Environment Agency

Wiltshire Council adopted a pivotal planning document in 2025, which sets out how the landscape around Stonehenge and Avebury will be protected for future generations. This new Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) now informs planning decisions that affect the setting of the Neolithic and Bronze Age monuments and the unparalleled UNESCO-recognised archaeological landscape.

Why 'setting' is important

When we experience prehistoric monuments and ceremonial landscapes, their surroundings can often affect how we appreciate the significance and value of the archaeological remains. That is why protecting the setting is a key priority for the Stonehenge & Avebury World Heritage Site Partnership.

The SPD outlines which planning applications require further assessment of their potential impacts, taking much more into account than simply how geographically close a proposed development is to Stonehenge and Avebury. Key setting considerations include the relationships of the monuments to each other, to the natural topography, to rivers and water, and to the skies and astronomy. As well as a necessary planning tool, the document is a highly useful resource for anyone interested in the archaeological landscape.

How we experience the landscape

Like other chalk downlands in southern Britain, the World Heritage Site is a largely open landscape and broadly rural in character. Important species-rich grassland helps conserve the archaeological remains as well as nature. Due to limited woodland and buildings, the natural topography generally shapes visibility and therefore how we experience the monuments in the landscape. Gently rising downs, open plains, and prominent ridgelines, all in different ways, limit and enable views across the World Heritage Site.

The Avebury landscape is defined most by the sheer monumentality and presence of its Neolithic

monuments. As you travel around, Silbury Hill 'pops up' in different views, though it dominates its local landscape and imposes itself behind the earlier-constructed West Kennet Long Barrow. And as you move along the West Kennet Avenue, it's only towards its northern end that the topography reveals the sheer scale of the banks, ditches and stones of Avebury Henge, which remarkably contrast with the village.

When looking out from Stonehenge, you may notice that you are surrounded by a defined ring of natural ridgelines, which were later utilised by Bronze Age builders to accentuate their barrows, including Normanton Down to the south, and King Barrow Ridge to the east. This prehistoric skyline is at the heart of how we appreciate and understand the hundreds of monuments in the Stonehenge landscape. Rivers and water are another key aspect of setting, with both Stonehenge and Durrington Walls physically connected to the River Avon by 'avenues' of different lengths. Dry valleys with their seasonal watercourse would also have influenced the positioning of prehistoric monuments.

The skies and astronomy are among the most famous aspects of setting, with components of Stonehenge, Woodhenge and Durrington Walls intricately designed to align with solar (and lunar) events. Experiencing the Stonehenge solstitial alignment is highly valued today and observed by many thousands each year.

What else is in the document?

The new SPD brings together guidance from UNESCO, Historic England and planning policy to provide clear advice for planners, developers, applicants, and consultees. To inform planning decisions, the document includes descriptions and mapping of many important locations, including sensitive ridgelines and astronomical alignments. It's well worth dipping into to find out more about the unparalleled landscape of Stonehenge and Avebury.

For more details, please contact the WHS Coordination Unit: stonehengeandaveburywhs@wiltshire.gov.uk

Further information:

<https://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/article/15270/World-Heritage-Site-Setting-Study>

<https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/373/>

<https://www.stonehengeandaveburywhs.org/about/our-partnership/>



Major monuments around Avebury.
© Wiltshire Council

NEWS FROM THE PORTABLE ANTIQUITIES SCHEME



Early medieval brooch from Hannington, Hampshire
© Creative Commons

My team and I have been busy identifying and recording hundreds of archaeological finds and Treasure items made by members of the public in Wiltshire and surrounding counties.

Recent finds include this interesting Early Medieval (Anglo Saxon) gilded copper alloy Great Square Headed brooch found in Hannington, dating to c. AD 540-575. Classified as Hines' Anglo-Saxon Great Square-headed Brooch Group I.

See Record ID: [WILT-CB475D - EARLY MEDIEVAL brooch](#) for the full record.



A fragment of Iron Age copper alloy beaded or knobbed bracelet found in Shrewton, dating to 800 BC -AD 100. It was reported to and recorded by the [Surrey FLO](#): Record ID: [SUR-776636 - IRON AGE bracelet](#)



We recorded this late Roman copper alloy pendant from Cherhill dating to AD 350-450. The horse heads are very similar to those on late Roman military buckles. The full record is here: Record ID: [WILT-E2BC5D - ROMAN pendant](#)

Sophie Hawke
Finds Liaison Officer for Wiltshire
Portable Antiquities Scheme finds.org.uk



Iron Age beaded bracelet from Shrewton.
© Creative Commons



Roman pendant from Cherhill.
© Creative Commons

IN CONVERSATION WITH . . .

Introducing the reader to people with many and varied roles, all contributing to the wonderful archaeology of Wiltshire and Swindon.

Our first star is

Roland Smith –
recently retired Wiltshire Council archaeologist.

Raised in Wiltshire, I went on my first 'dig' in 1978 as a teenager, excavating the bath house of a Roman fort on the Antonine Wall in Scotland. I now realise that, as a complete novice, I was asked to work in parts of the site where I wouldn't do much harm! After graduating from the Institute of Archaeology in London in the early 1980s, I started my professional career working for the Bath Archaeological Trust, largely digging small trial trenches in the maze of cellars that underlie central Bath. By 1986 I was working for the Trust for Wessex Archaeology (now Wessex Archaeology) and I stayed with the organisation until 2011, working my way up to senior management level. It was flattering to have achieved such a senior role, although inevitably it distanced me from the day-to-day practice of archaeology. From 2013 onwards I have acted as an archaeological advisor to planning authorities in Berkshire, Surrey, and most recently Wiltshire, a rewarding role that has enabled me to re-connect again with archaeology, and I now hope to go one further and get 'digging' again now that I am retired.

Your inspiration for involvement in archaeology

- Many things encouraged me to become an archaeologist but perhaps seeing P V Glob's 1969 book about the 'bog people', the extraordinarily well-preserved bodies of Iron Age people recovered from Danish peat bogs, fascinated, captivated, and inspired me as a teenager.

Biggest challenge of role -

Explaining to those who are unfamiliar, the processes and procedures of archaeological investigation, especially the essential need for analysing and making public the results.

Biggest reward of role -

Providing archaeological advice that leads to advances in knowledge of our shared past and then seeing that knowledge become publicly accessible through published reports and museum displays.

Most memorable find -

There have been many but one very simple object that sticks in my mind was a small, deliberately perforated, piece of chalk buried with a young Romano-British child. It may have been a toy - a reminder of how few archaeological finds relate to childhood.



Roland Smith, archaeologist.
© Wiltshire Council

Advice to a budding archaeologist -

Never forget that archaeology is all about people who lived, led extraordinary lives, and died centuries or millennia ago but shared the same human anxieties, emotions, and feelings we have today.

Favourite site in Wiltshire -

There are so many fabulous monuments in Wiltshire. Salisbury Cathedral is, rightly, internationally important, but Wiltshire has so many beautiful medieval parish churches. A particular favourite of mine is the Grade I listed Church of St Lawrence, Stratford Sub Castle, set in the beautiful Avon Valley, below Old Sarum.

Any exciting retirement plans -

Dusting down my trowel, which hasn't been used for decades, and getting the opportunity to go digging again...provided my knees can cope!



Church of St Lawrence, Stratford Sub Castle.
© Roland Smith

Please join us for a guided walk around historic Chippenham. Led by Dorothy Treasure, the Wiltshire Buildings Record principal buildings historian, and Melanie Pomeroy-Kellinger, County Archaeologist, the walk will explore Chippenham's Roman and Medieval roots and reveal recent archaeological discoveries, as well as viewing the oldest and most distinctive buildings in the town.

The walk will start at the Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre at 2PM on Wednesday 16th September. The walk is free, but as there is a limit on numbers, please email us to register, get further information and confirm your place at archaeology@wiltshire.gov.uk

HISTORIC CHIPPENHAM TO BE REVEALED ON 16th SEPTEMBER

The walk is part of a series of events Wiltshire Council is running in celebration of the national Heritage Open Days festival, currently coordinated by the National Trust and held every September to celebrate England's fantastic heritage and culture. For other events at the History Centre, please see details at Events - Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre



An extract from the 1784 'A Topographical Map of the Town and Borough of Chippenham' by John Powell

NEWS

SOUTHWEST ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH FRAMEWORK 2026 (SWARF)

The last Framework was published 20 years ago, and recently a 2-year project commenced to update it and ensure it reflects all the research done in the last 20 years as well as the contemporary challenges facing the preservation and management of the historic environment of the Southwest.

Funded by Historic England, and supported by local authority archaeologists in the Southwest, the work is being project managed by The Bureau for the Contemporary and Historic Consultancy. 80 archaeologists from across the region have signed up to be involved in writing, editing and providing data for the chapters, as well as period-based expert panel meetings. There will be a series of chronological chapters beginning with a resource assessment and followed by a research agenda. It will be published online alongside other Regional Research Agendas on the Research Framework Network and updated dynamically. Research questions will be prioritised using collaboratively agreed criteria, which will include evidential gaps, methodological feasibility, regional significance, sectoral relevance, and alignment with national research priorities. The Research Agendas will then be circulated to a wider research community of the archaeology of the Southwest to ensure that the new Framework reflects the full range of research and priorities. Publication is planned for March 2028. For further information, and to get involved, please contact: Nadia.Bartolini@BureauButch.co.uk

DEVIZES MUSEUM RELOCATION

The museum's planning application and Listed Building Consent for the restoration of the derelict Devizes Assize Court was approved by Wiltshire Council in August 2025, and the project secured a large grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund later in the year.



Devizes Assize Court.
© Creative Commons

The 19th-century Grade II* listed building will provide a new home for the museum with more space to showcase its collections drawn from the Stonehenge and Avebury World Heritage Site and from across Wiltshire. The new space is fully accessible and aims to become a community hub, serving both visitors and local residents. In addition to new state of the art galleries there will be a dedicated learning space, gardens and a café. The new museum aims to open to the public in 2030.

DIGITISATION PROJECT

The Archaeology Service holds a large collection of grey literature (unpublished fieldwork, assessment, and excavation reports), an important source of archaeological information and used extensively in planning applications. These date from 1962 (an excavation at Down Barn Enclosure, near Avebury) to the present day. A large proportion of these reports are paper based only, and a project has been carrying on since 2025 to scan each report and link the digital copy to the corresponding source record found on our HER database. We have been very lucky to welcome fantastic volunteers who give up their time to come to the office and scan each report, however long. This task enables us to not only have easy digital access to reports which can be sent to interested parties, but also a backup to an analogue library which could be vulnerable to fire, flood and other building disasters. The volunteers only have a few hundred reports to complete (July 2026) and we are extremely grateful for all their work.

ARCHAEOLOGY SERVICE OFFICE MOVE

The Archaeology Service moved the contents of their office over two busy days in December 2025 from the ground floor of the Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre to the sunlit uplands of the first floor. Filing cabinets full of aerial photographs and measured drawings were wheeled into the History Centre's lift and folders and boxes of books and reports were moved by trolleys. This was a good opportunity to review the existing archive – does anyone still use floppy discs? – and catalogue and order our library. Future visitors will still be able to access our grey literature reports and aerial photos by prior appointment at archaeology@wiltshire.gov.uk and will enjoy a little more light!



Our wonderful
volunteers in
action.
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Council