

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Introduction by Lisa Brown, Curator**

*In November 2019, the Wiltshire Museum was awarded £47,000 from the Arts Council England Designation Development Fund, to review the research undertaken on our nationally important archaeology collections. From 2010-2020, more than 200 postgraduate students undertaking archaeological research visited the Museum to access the collections, but only a small fraction of their work had been fed back into our collections database and gallery displays.*

*One of the main aims of the project was to identify the results of all this research and then update museum records, to improve our collections management systems. Going forward, as a legacy of the project, new processes have been put in place that will require greater detail from researchers concerning their results, and also ensure that this information is regularly imported into our collections management system, MODES. By reviewing the research that has been undertaken over the past decade, it has also been possible for the Museum to identify the under-researched areas of the collections, to promote them as possible areas of future enquiry to post-graduate students looking for projects. This is a new and dynamic way forward for museums, who are usually approached with requests to view material, rather than considering what they might want to find out about their own collections and then actively pursuing academic partners with whom they can work collaboratively.*

*Not unsurprisingly, a majority of the 200 post-graduates who have visited the Museum over the past decade, have come to research our Early Bronze Age collections from the World Heritage Site of Avebury and Stonehenge. However, this Research Agenda clearly identifies the potential to do much more, with opportunities to reassess our Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, later Bronze Age, Iron Age, Roman, and Medieval collections.*

*In addition to this document and processes, another key legacy of the project has been the creation of c. 1,600 'enhanced' MODES records, which document the findings of researcher in detail. From 2023, these records will be shared online, as part of the Wessex Museums Virtual Collections database, making the information accessible in the widest possible terms.*

### **1.2 Methodology**

This report is based on the results of a review of archaeological research undertaken on the collections of the Wiltshire Museum (the Museum) as part of the *A Wealth of Knowledge Project* (WoK). In scope, this review encompassed all research projects either undertaken or published between 2010 and early 2022, and which resulted in results either received by, or accessible to the Museum. 80 reports, articles, and theses, were identified and reviewed as part of the project, including sixteen PhD theses (Figure 1.1). A comparable study by Historic England (2022) identified twelve PhD theses covering the museum collections between 2010 and 2020, suggesting the review was relatively comprehensive.

These results have then been contextualised within a non-exhaustive literature review, focusing on the *Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine* (WANHM) and key national journals, and a review of the Museum collections. Unfortunately, a full review of the physical collections was beyond the scope of this project, and physical artefacts were only accessed in a small minority of cases where additional clarification was required, and as such, the suggestions of this report must be considered preliminary, and built upon by more detailed reviews as part of the planning of subsequent research projects.

### 1.3 Key findings

- The Early Bronze Age (2,500-1,500 BC) and Middle Bronze Age to Middle Iron Age (1,500-100 BC) collections are the most widely used elements of the Museum collections.
- Interest in the Early Bronze Age is driven by research projects accessing grave goods and human remains, combining both more traditional typochronological methods and scientific analyses (e.g. aDNA analysis, isotopic analysis).
- Interest in the Middle Bronze Age to Middle Iron Age has been primarily driven by animal bone from Potterne and East Chisenbury, almost exclusively revolving around scientific analyses.
- The Later Iron Age to Roman (100 BC – AD 410) and Medieval to Post-Medieval (1066-1900) collections generate the least research interest relative to the proportion of the collections which they make up.
- The Later Iron Age to Roman period has been accessed by an equivalent number of research projects as the Neolithic period, but the results have been much lower impact. Typically, research projects into the Later Iron Age and Roman periods employ typochronological methodologies which engage with objects in only a very limited way, and contribute little to our wider understanding of sites. Generally, it can be said that the Museum collections have been treated as an extension of the Portable Antiquities Scheme Database.
- The Medieval to Post-Medieval period has generated negligible research interest, limited to discussions individual objects.
- The Museum's positive relationship with Dr Richard Madgwick of the University of Cardiff has driven consistent research interest in the animal bone assemblages of Potterne and East Chisenbury, both through large-scale research projects such as FeastNet (<https://feastnet.co.uk/>), but also through students supervised by Dr Madgwick.
- Building similarly effective working relationships with academics in other regional universities should be seen as a priority.
- Many aspects of the Museum collections may not be capable of supporting PhD level research, but may be a better fit for MSc or taught MA dissertation-level

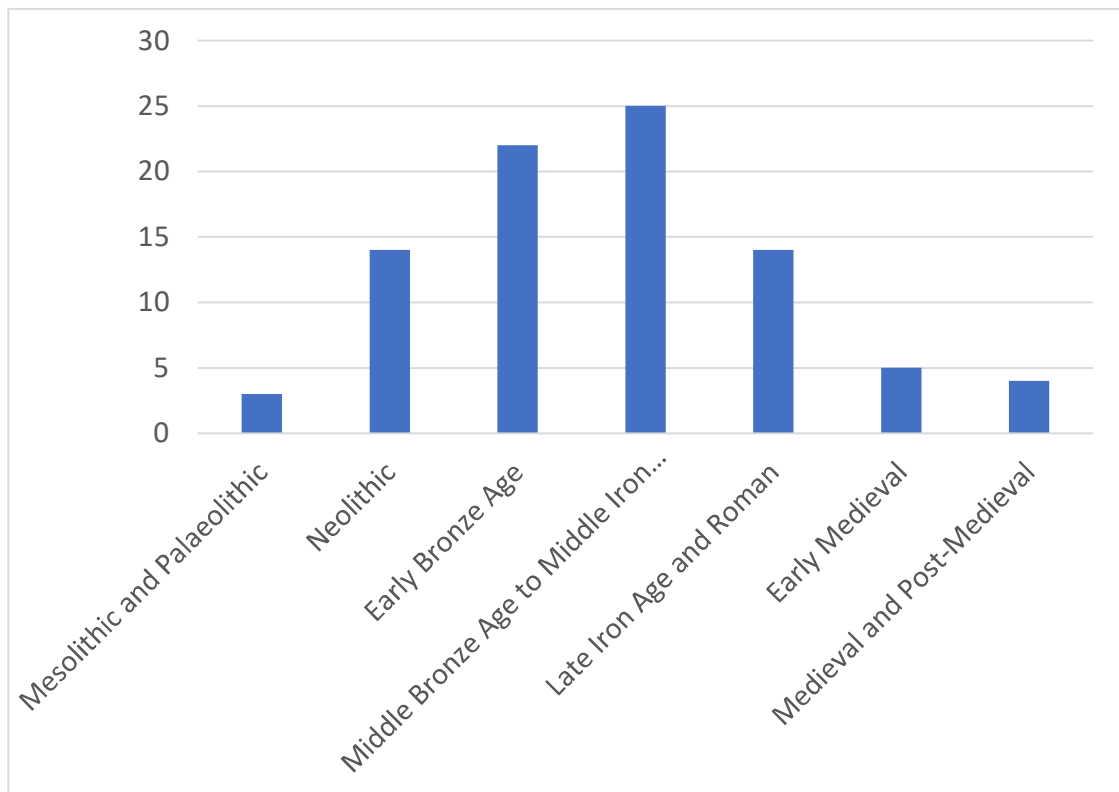


Figure 1.1: Number of research projects by period.

projects, and the museum needs to more proactively promote this resource.

- The museum holds a large quantity of archaeological ceramics covering all periods, however, there has been extremely little interest in the material generally.
- The Early Medieval cemeteries at Collingbourne Ducis, Blacknall Field, and Barrow Clump, as well as sizable animal bone and ceramic assemblages from the associated settlements at Collingbourne Ducis and Market Lavington offer clear avenues for future research and should be promoted accordingly.
- Gaps in research into the collections have highlighted weaknesses in the

coverage of the collections themselves, which can then inform future collecting priorities.

- A lack of significant, stratified, animal bone assemblages hampers research into the Neolithic, Early Bronze Age and Late Iron Age to Roman periods.
- The ability of the museum to facilitate research into the Palaeolithic and, more notably, Mesolithic is limited by a lack of excavated archaeological material.
- The human remains from the Late Iron Age to Roman period are typically from relatively isolated rural burials, with no larger groups around which a research project can be easily built.
- Whilst the Museum holds a significant collection of human remains from the Early Bronze Age (2,500-1,500 BC), surprisingly few of the grave goods and

funerary vessels in the collections have associated human remains.

- The Museum holds relatively little material relating to the Middle to Late Bronze Age (c.1500-1000 BC).
- The Museum holds a large number of potentially significant assemblages and archives excavated during the twentieth century and which remain unpublished, in particular:

- Grimes' excavations of the moated manor-house at Membury compliments the large assemblage from Ludgershall Castle, and would also meaningfully increase the research potential of the Medieval collections more generally.
- Proudfoot's excavations of two barrows on Roughridge Hill, Bishops Cannings, produced important evidence of early Neolithic occupation, with ceramics comparable to the Conybury Anomaly.

## **2. Palaeolithic and Mesolithic (c. 750,000-4,000 BC)**

### **2.1 Summary of the collections**

#### **2.1.1 Palaeolithic**

The Palaeolithic collections of the Wiltshire Museum are relatively limited. There are 1,248 entries attributed to this period in the collections management database, with the majority of these being records of individual Lower Palaeolithic handaxes. Whilst there have been some recent acquisitions of chance finds, such as a handaxe from Huish reported through the Portable Antiquities Scheme (DZSWS:2019.10), the majority derive from old collections. In both cases there is limited surviving contextual information.

By far the most significant assemblage of Palaeolithic objects derive from the artefact-rich gravel pit at Knowle Farm, Little Bedwyn. 1,132 of the records are attributed to this site, and it is likely that some of the handaxes attributed to neighbouring parishes, such as two from Savernake, may also have derived from the site or a related deposit. The Knowle Farm gravel pit is famous for the quantity of flint recovered, and by 1903 over 2,000 flint 'implements' had reportedly been discovered (Cunnington and Cunnington 1903). This represents the most significant deposit of Lower Palaeolithic material in the region, and whilst the handaxes are now widely dispersed, the collection held in Wiltshire Museum remains the largest (Roe 1968; 1969). The collection has been recognised from early on as a mixture of multiple deposits, probably deposited by river action, unfortunately limiting their usefulness for statistical analysis (Cunnington and Cunnington 1903; Roe 1968; 1969).

Several descriptions of the site appeared in the Wiltshire Archaeology and Natural History Magazine (WANHM) in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, however they contain insufficient detail to allow for in depth discussion of the geology or archaeology of the site (Cunnington and Cunnington 1903; Dixon 1903; Kendall 1906). More recently, in 1977 a trial trench was opened by mechanical excavator (Froom 1983). This was able to provide limited clarification of the clarification of the site, but due to the method of excavation the stratigraphic relationships of the 70 Paleolithic flints recovered were not recorded, with the exception of a single handaxe (Froom 1983). It is also disappointing that none of the material recovered during this excavation appears to have entered the museum collections. Both Kendall (1906) and Froom (1983) note the presence of flakes and other evidence of knapping within the material recovered, although this is denied by the Cunningtons (Cunnington and Cunnington 1903). A sample of 461 of the less worn handaxes were examined in detail by Roe for his PhD, who noted that the assemblage is dominated by ovate forms, and suggested that it was characterised by unusually crudely-made tools (1968; 1969). The Knowle Farm flints are also known for a highly distinctive and poorly understood 'gloss' (Cunnington & Cunnington 1903; Dixon 1903).

The only other sites associated with significant numbers of Palaeolithic objects are both in the Salisbury-area, with 58 handaxes attributed to the gravel extraction pits at Millford Hill and Bemerton. The handaxes were donated by C.J. Read, who also published the sites (Read 1884), and whilst detailed sketch