Perceptions feedback – Fieldwork, Greystones Farm, 26-31 August 2017

Background

Between the 26-31 August, 2017, 20 local volunteers took part in an archaeological fieldwork project at Greystones Farm. The aims of the project were to:

- carry out a landscape survey of the wider Greystones area through augering and test pitting in order to enhance understanding of the past environment;
- change volunteers' perceptions of archaeology and landscape change through taking part in the above;
- gather volunteer feedback to assess the success of the fieldwork in changing perceptions;
- contribute to Greystones Farm's 'Love You Landscape Day' and engage visitors with more integrated messages about how Greystones has changed over thousands of years
- produce a short film to showcase the impact of the project and the holistic management of Greystones Farm

Volunteer demographic

Age - Under 18 (2)/ 18-30 (2) / 31-50 (5) / 51-65 (2) / 65+ (9)

Gender - female 11 / male – 9

All participants live in the Cotswolds.

17 participants classed themselves as White British/English, 1 as Chinese, 1 as British Asian and 1 as Chinese British.

Volunteer feedback overview (before taking part in the fieldwork)

Volunteers completed questionnaires before and after they began the fieldwork. The questions aimed to gather data on how individuals' perceived the landscape and its management and how much they thought the wider landscape had changed over time.

Of the volunteers who fully completed their surveys, the majority chose to attend the fieldwork as they wanted to learn more about the history of Greystones. Only 2 had any previous archaeological experience and therefore their expectations were based solely on preconceptions of archaeology. The questions volunteers hoped to find out about the landscape were quite specific, e.g. who lived at Greystones and for how long. In terms of how they perceived that the landscape would have changed, the main comments were that today we see more buildings, fewer trees, change in land use due to farming and larger communities. Almost everyone felt that today there is less tree cover, more soil erosion and soil degradation and less wildlife diversity than there would have been in the past. This suggests quite a strongly negative impression of human impact on the landscape.

In terms of current landscape management, of those who were familiar with Greystones, the main issues which arose were:

- Hedge laying
- Land drain restoration

- Education work
- Management of the wildflowers and rivers
- Organic farming
- Inoculating badgers
- Recovering water meadows/river recovery and habitat

None of the volunteers mentioned specific management schemes such as CS, SAM or the SSSI, although there was clearly awareness of the SAM status and SSSI which came up over the course of discussions during the fieldwork.

When asked how the site of Greystones Farm is managed today, 86% said the site was well manged, 12% that it was under manged and 12% that it was over managed.

Good management was linked to the following actions:

- Excellent reserve team and volunteers
- Controlling river erosion
- Doing wildlife surveys
- Controlling litter and dog fouling
- Because it looks great, is tidy and has lots of wildlife
- The link between farming and the wildlife/meadows which are grazed at times
- The team here has a good understanding of the area and want to bring it back to excellent condition using traditional methods
- Trying to get conditions right for flora and fauna

While all participants were aware that funding for Greystones comes from the Wildlife Trust, no one was aware that part of that funding comes from government support through agri-environemnt schemes. Two thirds of participants thought that alongside the GWT a wider range of sources, including national and local government, local communities, other local and national charities and 'all stakeholders' should be contributing financially to the management of Greystones Farm.

Hopes for the future of the Greystones landscape before taking part in the fieldwork included:

- That the trust continues its good work
- Protection and appreciation
- To be used more by different groups and to encourage exercise and learning
- To continue to improve the landscape and encourage more public/children and to improve the beauty and history of the area
- Preservation and enhancement of the wildflower meadows and river landscape
- Investigation and exploration of the archaeology of the site
- Continued development
- Increased diversity in plants and wildlife
- Greater public support, understanding and engagement
- For Greystones to continue to thrive and for more evidence of its past to be found
- I'm optimistic!
- More trees and wildlife

Volunteer overview after taking part in the fieldwork

New information participants cited as gaining from taking part in the augering and test pitting fieldwork included:

- Greater understanding of the landscape and how it is shaped
- How wet the land was in the past and the effect of farming on the landscape
- Learned about soil and how the appearance of the oppidum affected the area, the way the river moved the soils and how to date/see changes in the test pits and augering holes
- That is was probably farmed from an early time
- How the whole site was laid out
- Learnt about the land surrounding the oppidum
- It was an oppidum not just a farm
- The oppidum, although impressive in size, probably only had a few 100 Late Iron Age people dwelling here. Their farming was based around arable and livestock
- Learned more about the landscape beneath us and what makes the landscape what it is today
- How to record the past landscape through archaeological drawing
- How much you can learn from the soil
- There was a massive IA oppidum!
- How thin the soil is

In terms of the impact the fieldwork had on perceptions of the landscape of Greystones Farm, participants showed a real shift in the way they now look at the area based on an appreciation of human and natural influences:

- I am now starting to understand how man has influenced the landscape
- How the water table is not very far down and how we can use soil to reconstruct the past
- We have seen the soil difference and know what was likely to be gown and how ground levels were different in the past
- Augering and test pits showed it would have been more forested and wetter in the past
- Augering and test pits provided information about the changing landscape
- There might not have been as many trees in the Iron Age as I expected
- Soil analysis will find information on changes in land use over thousands of years
- I now understand what Greystones it is made up of and its whole history
- Importance of soil samples
- I realise that the current landscape has been changed by a whole host of factors
- I now know how historical Greystones is
- Surprising lack of intensive cultivation in the Iron Age

This shift in perceptions of how the landscape is formed and why it looks the way it does also had a significant impact on the way participants feel the Greystones landscape is being managed today.

Reasons why the fieldwork changed perceptions of current and future management at Greystones included:

- The top soil is so thin, therefore we need to think carefully about future management in the wider landscape – more cows less ploughing!
- I would like to protect it for the future generations and hope it would be used in a positive way for farming and teaching children/people about farming/nature/history and green issues

- I now realise the oppidum and surrounding area is important archaeologically as well as for wildlife
- It was not all covered in woodland in the past, and so perhaps keeping it as it is is how it should be expected to be managed rather than planting more trees
- It is managed carefully because it contains a SAM and SSSI meadows
- I now have a more positive view of their (The GWT) work here
- Today it is managed in such a way that is does not disturb the artefacts while still being a traditional farm
- I realise that conservation and change can be combined

Those who stated that the work had not changed their views of the management of Greystones cited the following reasons:

- The GWT is conscious about keeping the farm as it was
- As a volunteer I understand how the farm is managed using best practice and sympathy towards tradition
- I already believed that Greystones was managed for farming, wildlife and archaeology and this just reinforces the importance of that

Taking part also led some people to consider the way the Greystones landscape had been managed in the past:

- The work throws up more questions about what went on here!
- I hadn't thought about how the river may have influenced farming and transportation
- It has made me more aware of the history of the landscape
- I've realised the damage that farming can do
- I did not have a preconception of how it was managed but now I have information on what things might have happened here
- I can now start to think about these things because of the data provided by soil analysis and soil structures
- It has given me greater understanding of past management and I look forward to reading the results
- I know that all different periods will have used and affected the landscape in different ways and for different purposes

The work also shifted perceptions of the role of archaeology in understanding landscapes in multiple ways:

- I am now starting to understand environmental archaeology
- Finding slag made me think about what this can tell us about the different jobs/activities happening in a landscape – why was it there?
- It has made me think about how the land was used and how it has endured as well as more about life in different times
- Yes, we can learn a lot from changes in soil patterns even between fields
- I didn't think archaeology would involve the analysis of the soil structure
- Looking at soil structures, snails, pollen etc. can provide information about the past
- I thought archaeology was mostly about artefacts and constructions
- Augering and analysis of soils and test pits tells us about how land was used and over what period that may have changed
- The importance of soil samples and snails to help date and make a bigger picture of history

- It is not just about finding artefacts, it is about looking at how the landscape has been changed by human action

Interestingly, there wasn't any change in terms of how much participants thought that the landscape of Greystones would have changed over time as the majority said 'a lot' when asked in round one. This shows how there is awareness of landscape change but that the nuances and mechanisms causing this change are relatively unknown. Only though taking part in the fieldwork and having the processes of human and natural action on the landscape explained over time did volunteers really begin to understand the complexity of this process. This can be seen when comparing responses to the same questions about 'what might be different now in comparison to the past' between the formative and summative assessments.

As seen in part one of this analysis, the formative responses focused on very broad aspects of change such as – more buildings, fewer trees, changes in farming practice and community. The summative responses were much more detailed:

- Change in vegetation, profile of the land and changing water courses
- The reeds have gone by the river, farming has changed the way the land looks, silt has accumulated, we are higher up from the glacial gravels – new surface level
- Land levels have changed
- Not so much flooding now and the land is higher
- Soil depth has changed – soils have built up as well as being eroded
- In the Late Iron Age there was a settlement in the oppidum, cattle, grazing, wet meadows with tall rushes
- Hillwash and flooding in the valley have changed the levels of the soil
- The rivers and streams have moved and the meadows have changed through farming and human occupation
- The rivers would be very different or even not there. Also the ground would be very different in shape
- The action by humans over thousands of years has moulded the land e.g. draining the marshy areas etc.

Participants also stated that they were more aware of the current management of Greystones after taking part. Although agri-environement schemes etc. were not addressed, there was still a shift towards more integrated understanding of the management of Greystones farm.

- The marriage of the tenant farmer with preservation of the site through the presence of the dairy farm
- Organic cattle farm working with wildlife
- Management of SSSI meadows

Interestingly, after taking part in the fieldwork all participants stated that Greystones Farm was well managed, thus shifting the perceptions of those few who originally said it was over or undermanaged.

Augering and test pitting were felt to be particularly useful ways to engage with the wider story of the Greystones landscape and its management because:

- It provides a view on the changes to the landscape
- Yes, otherwise the story is hidden. It builds up a picture of land use over a long time and wide area

- The augering and test pits will add more detail to our understanding through the results
- It builds a historical picture of past and present and how we live today
- It's been an eye opener!
- Augering can provide a snapshot across an area of land beneath our feet at specific intervals. Equally, excavation can provide possible artefacts, information about soil structure which give a clue to the past
- It provides an insight into the past
- Yes, because the way the soil structure changes tells a story about human intervention
- It has given a better understanding of historic land management and how layers tell a story
- It is fairly non-intrusive but can show the history of the land and how it has changed and what caused these changes
- It can tell us how peopled lived
- It shows land use over a wide period

These benefits led many to suggest that it would be useful to extend the research:

- To provide a greater understanding of the wider environment
- This would be a great project to do with schools, to interview them and then do augering and test pits to help them understand landscapes and how they change
- To get a bigger picture of life over history
- To find out how large an area was used outside the oppidum
- For my own interest
- Because more understanding of the past is useful to conservation today
- Having a better understanding of how Salmonsbury fits into the wider landscape would help us to better understand the whole history of this area
- To keep learning and gaining more knowledge about landscape structure
- It can tell us about the whole of Bourton not just Greystones

Perhaps most importantly, the work changed participants' hopes for the future of Greystones Farm and its management:

- I am starting to understand how the landscape can change and therefore we need to look after it
- By understanding landscape change we can better understand protective measures, and I hope it [the landscape] will be preserved
- To grow the project at Greystones and continue to create a picture of the landscape
- I hope it will continue to be cared for and improved
- It is good to preserve our heritage
- I have more understanding and want to get more involved
- More trees – but simply because I like trees!
- Yes, because the more we understand the more people will value what is on their doorstep.
- It hasn't changed my views really but I do think the results will be useful for the GWT and they will learn from the information you provide
- I hope that people are positive about the landscape and continue to investigate here
- That the community will better see its value.

Conclusion

The survey data clearly shows the power of environmental archaeology methodologies to change perceptions of landscapes and their management over time. In the case of Greystones Farm, the work also helped participants to value more deeply the importance of the GWT's careful current management strategy. This also helped individuals see the need for an integrated management approach which combines wildlife, farming and heritage and makes use of historical land use data to plan for the future. The potential of the engagement method to increase wider public understanding of Greystones and landscapes further afield was also recognised, particularly in relation to working with school children/education to increase connections to and understanding of local landscapes. All participants took away the message of the importance of managing landscapes for the future as both natural and human action causes landscapes to change.

A short video showing the success of the fieldwork and integrating it with the GWT's 'Love your Landscape' open day can be found here:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wqd_1WtEBLI&feature=youtu.be

Thank you!

The REFIT Team would like to thank all the volunteers and the team at Greystones Farm for working with us to make this possible.