

Chapter 16

A ONCE AND FUTURE LANDSCAPE: issues and objectives

'England's landscape is its consummate artefact - not merely the locus of the heritage but its mainstay....It is an English creed that all land requires human supervision.'

Lowenthal 1991, 215, 216

Consummate or otherwise, the whole of the landscape of Fyfield and Overton, in so many respects so typically English, is in some degree artefactual. This study has demonstrated much of that effect to have been brought about by human supervision. The area has been and is valued as agricultural land, producing an economic return; that will doubtless continue, but already another set of values is also being applied to the area which now finds itself increasingly containing 'landscape' rather than just 'land'. These other values are primarily based on concepts of conservation, recreation and amenity. The first clearly, and probably also containing elements from the other two ideas, is increasingly if still rather vaguely embracing heritage values, a composite idea promoted as the century ends more and more as bait for economic return. It may well be that in an area so close to visitor-attractive Avebury, the 21st century will see a different sort of 'farming' based on marketing terms like 'tourist crop' rather than traditional products like bushels of wheat or flocks of sheep. As this study ends, it is quite conceivable that another phase of historical development in the land-use of our study area is just beginning (Fowler and Stabler 1998).

The considerable time, effort and resources (happily) put into trying to understand the landscape of Overton and Fyfield should have more than an academic, serendipitous and personal outcome. We would not presume to think we might have improved matters but, if our somewhat fuller and different academic perspective can now inform what was the mid-century understanding of the area, then this could have implications for the management of this landscape.

Here we pursue this thought with particular reference to the concepts of 'conservation management' and 'World Heritage'. We do so accepting a social and economic context which assumes it to be entirely desirable that this land should continue to generate agricultural livelihoods. Any new perspective of this landscape must not be used to

'freeze' it as it is now, to fix it in time as it is in the late 20th century, let alone to justify attempts to return it to fuzzily conceptualised rustic pasts.

If our Project has illustrated anything it is that this landscape is what it is because of what it has been, because of the way it has been used. The first conclusion to draw is that the heritage for us to pass on in this case is, not its fossilisation, but this landscape's continuing dynamic of change. We must manage it, in the sense of look after it to produce an agreed effect to common benefit, so that posterity too, like us of our former times, may read and enjoy the inarticulate but graphic pages of field and down. It is for all of us in collective common sense, whether or not we label ourselves and each other 'conservationists' or 'conservation managers', to ensure that the landscape we hand on continues to contain that capacity for stimulating individual experiences, be they aesthetic, emotional, intellectual or physical. 'It's just the sense of space' was the reply of one cyclist when I asked why she and her group made the effort to ride out along the Ridgeway. That is very important; public access to that sense of space in a privately-owned landscape is vital, quite as much as - but no more so than, - other sorts of access to other dimensions which this landscape must retain and be able to offer. The poet, the scientist, the academic, they all want to see their landscapes, like the young cyclist, and their right to do so is as powerful as that of the local resident and the actual landowner. Legally, this land is not their land; but assuredly the landscape is.

The second conclusion, equally basic, is that we really must bring respect once more into our intercessions with our landscape. It is not just a factory floor, it is not just a commercial asset, it is not just a tourist attraction, it is not just a recreational facility, it is not just the back yard of the saga-generation and it is not - and we say it, - just an archaeological site. It is of course all those things, in quite interesting and challenging patterns, but a sense of respect for the landscape should be the common ground between all such interests. By 'respect' we mean starting from not particularism, not self-interest, not ignorance, but from an informed appreciation that the landscape we live with is what it is because others have created it for us. 'Tread lightly on this earth', a Countryside Commission exhortation on a 1995 poster, is sound advice to guide our thoughts and deliberations as well as our actions.

Exploring Our Past

English Heritage's (1991a) publication under the above title was helpful in guiding our assessment of the Project (Chapter 1); it is also helpful at its end, for example with generalisations such as: 'It is through the record left by the surviving remains of past generations that we can interpret most clearly the impact of humankind on the

environment of these islands.' The text continues that, as a consequence, it is necessary to '...identify the surviving individual sites or landscapes which are the most important indicators... then to ensure that these are properly understood and that their significance is fully recognised... The most important sites must [then] be managed ...' [English Heritage 1991a, 1].

There can be few places in the British Isles where 'the record' is more clearly etched on the landscape than on and around Fyfield and Overton Downs. Although this volume is much concerned with detail and particular sites, the whole is actually about the interaction through time of human and environmental dynamics; that is to say the evolution of a magnificent example of a 'surviving landscape'. Furthermore, the Project has always been concerned with recognition, understanding and - though the phrase had not been invented in 1959, - resource management. A more informed perspective that might now be brought to the study area, and especially the Downs whether they be archaeologically well-preserved or badly-damaged, is a potentially significant contribution to the achievement of the official objectives quoted above.

That may seem, and indeed prove to be, a pious hope, but not necessarily, as three examples of small but significant official conservation actions have demonstrated. The Fyfield Down National Nature Reserve (NNR) management plan drawn up and **periodically reviewed by the (now) Environment Agency (formerly Nature Conservancy, then English Nature - make sure I've got this right) has increasingly** reflected not just the quantitative growth of the amount of archaeology in the NNR but also, and rather more importantly, a growing awareness of the significance of the archaeology both in enhancing the quality of the Reserve and in impinging on management responsibilities (English Nature 1991). **(I could make much more use of the EN Mangt. Plan).**

The number of Scheduled Ancient Monuments on Fyfield and Overton Downs was increased markedly as a direct result of the Project's early publications (SAM numbers 820a, 821, 823, 824, 825 and 826, fig. 16.2.) in the ??1970s. Then, a revision of the Schedule in the ???1980s expanded the boundaries of the 'old' SAM 476 to include much of Fyfield Down and of SAM 000 to include much of southern Overton Down (fig. 16.2). The Scheduling is being reviewed, one hopes with a view to rationalisation, as this text is being written and, to that end, fig. 2.1 here has been made available to English Heritage in advance of publication. **[That para. to be checked with Amanda Chadburn - and possibly expanded; and there will have to be a separate fig. showing all the SAMS = fig. 16.2)**

Also during the preparation of this volume in 1995, Church Close, the field immediately SW of Overton church, came on the market. Its sale raised the possibility of some form of change from its existing use as grazing land. The field contains the excellently-preserved village earthworks illustrated in fig. 11.2, a plan which was already in existence together with an early draft of part of Chapter 11. The draft (Archive FWP 26) described the earthworks and, importantly in the circumstances, brought out their possible historical significance (here proposed in fig. 11.3) Plan and text were sent to English Heritage to help support the case for Scheduling the earthworks, which have indeed now become a Scheduled Ancient Monument (**ref no.**). The immediate urgency, incidentally, has passed, for the new ownership wants the field to continue under grass.

Another incident occurred on The Ridgeway in the long hot summer of 1995. It happened quite unexpectedly while this text was in the writing when well-intentioned but misconceived works under the aegis of Countryside Commission and County Council began on The Ridgeway just south of its intersection with Green Street between Overton and Avebury Downs (figs. 2.1, 8.1; Fowler *et al.* 1995. Had we been certain that the area had previously been called 'Hackpen', we could have brought that name back into circulation at the time). Interesting in its own right, particularly in illuminating the interface between research and management, the 'Hackpen Incident' also serves as a metaphor for countryside misunderstanding and heritage tensions. It is described in detail elsewhere (Fowler and Blackwell 1998), but its lessons are quite clear.

First, at the practical level two requisites can be specified. They are good communication between those involved with an area, and the involvement, the active participation, of local people. More generally, divisions between theory and practicality, between research and good management, between academic concerns and the so-called 'real world' are, we believe, false. Indeed, our argument goes further and asserts that such contradistinctions exist only in the minds of proponents - and mainly in those of managers rather than academics, - and actually lead to bad management as a result. Much of what ideally should be involved within a model of conservation management over the south west corner of the Marlborough Downs seems as yet either too particularistic or too unfocussed, leading to flaws in practice and unnecessary threats to the cultural landscape exemplified by the 'Hackpen Incident' of 1995.

It is now most unlikely that heritage issues will disappear from the Avebury landscape in the foreseeable future. Indeed, perhaps the most important development is a wider recognition that 'heritage issues' are a basic part of the Avebury area's heritage, issues

which are combustible, complex and, far from being the peripheral single issue of an antiquarian clique, are quite as politically and professionally challenging as public health and education.

We now turn from the particulars of The Ridgeway to some aspects of a landscape of conservation and its heritage management over the area as a whole. We look in particular at the concept of World Heritage to which reference has already been made, and argue that it is as a World Heritage Site that the future of the Avebury area lies, including the whole of Fyfield and Overton Downs.

A Landscape of Designation

One of the clearest conclusions from the whole study is not merely that very little of the landscape in our study area is 'natural' but that much of it has a very long history of management indeed. From Clatford Bottom to Silbury Hill, we are indeed looking at, and have in our stewardship, a 'cultural landscape' (Birks *et al.* 1988). Of course, historically the management which has produced that landscape has varied through time, apparently being strong and expressing itself through well-organised landscapes in some periods while at other times being less prominent archaeologically. Even so, absence of archaeological evidence does not necessarily mean weak management, nor does positive management necessarily express itself through monuments: one senses, for example, that fairly firm directives were emanating from medieval Winchester to the Overton estate without there being much to show for them on the ground now. At the very least, the constraints and seasonal rhythms of good husbandry would always impose their own management precepts whether or not there was an estate office for prehistoric, Roman or medieval landowner.

Management, good or bad, has always been present in the exploitation and sustenance of a landscape's resources. There is therefore nothing new at all in the idea or practice of managing a landscape from a conservation point of view. Husbandry as been practiced over our study area for a lot of the local history is based on the very same idea. Objectives may embrace different emphases; methods may change; but the process is the same, whether a Bronze Age farmer digs a long ditch across the Downs, whether a group of villagers walks its estate boundaries in the 10th century AD, or whether we try to influence the future landscape by designation now. We have merely re-discovered the concept of good husbandry and re-labelled it 'sustainability' as some begin to hear the global alarm bells ringing in the sort of way that a few may well have done locally about 900 BC and again, to their horror, about AD 1313. One may well

remark 'And look what happened to them', but nothing that happened in Fyfield or Overton was ever going to stop the world.

Designation has become the characteristic methodology of managing the Fyfield/Overton landscape over the last 40 years. Indeed, the process has gone so far as to justify our calling the landscape a 'landscape of designation'. Designation now characterises the landscape itself, not just the way in which it is managed. A mid/late-20th century way of doing things, in other words, is already leaving its imprint on the landscape in a similar process to that which enables us to pick out the doings of an anonymous Roman *agrimensor* and Richard of *Raddun*.

The principal features in 'the designated landscape' in the study area are indicated on figs. 16.1 and 16.2. The main types of designation and the areas they cover over the northern part of our area are shown in fig. 16.2, together with a proposal. The various designations are generally authorised and imprinted on the landscape by bodies in business to conserve or manage conservation; most do not own the land. West Woods (the eastern part of the 'permanent woodland' on fig. 9.4), however, is managed by The Forest Authority, in business to produce timber but also with a statutory recreational and conservation responsibility. So in addition to providing walks through the Woods, the Authority also has a policy of archaeological conservation management (ref: **FC is providing**). In a sense, therefore, the archaeological resource in the Woods is being looked after as elsewhere in the study area, but by active management rather than proscriptive designation.

Overall, the landscape between Fyfield and Avebury has clearly become subject to a multiplicity of designations, constraints, and policy initiatives, some specifically archaeological and all, whether the originators intended so or not, with archaeological implications. We see at work here locally one of the great misconceptions of previous generations that understandably but disastrously came to underpin so much conservation provision nationally, that is the assumption that the landscape is 'natural'. Here, some of the provisions are overlapping in their objectives while others are partly contradictory. Four main levels or scales of interest exist: international, national, county and local. We look briefly at the principle national one and then the less well-known international one, rapidly and rightly becoming more and more significant with the Avebury area very much in the van of developments.

The *Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979*, interpreted and reinforced by the Department of the Environment's Policy Planning Guidelines 16 entitled

Archaeology and Planning (DoE 1990), provide the current statutory and non-statutory framework of national policy on archaeological monuments. Doubtless both will be revised from time to time, but their fundamentals are unlikely to depart far from those of a legal situation which has evolved over more than a century. PPG 16 in particular contains the following crucial assertion of principle which seems particularly relevant to archaeological resource management in the Fyfield/Overton/Avebury area:

“Archaeological remains should be seen as a finite and non-renewable resource, in many cases highly fragile and vulnerable to damage and destruction. Appropriate management is therefore essential to ensure that they survive in good condition. In particular, care must be taken to ensure that archaeological remains are not needlessly or thoughtlessly destroyed. They contain irreplaceable information about our past and the potential for an increase in future knowledge. They are part of our sense of national identity and are valuable both for their own sake and for their role in education, leisure and tourism.” (paragraph 6)

“Where nationally important archaeological remains, whether Scheduled or not, and their settings, are affected by proposed development there should be a presumption in favour of their physical preservation.” (paragraph 8)

World Heritage

The Avebury area shares with Stonehenge and its environs the distinction of jointly forming a single World Heritage Site (C373 - Stonehenge, Avebury and associated sites). This designation was first included on the World Heritage List on 28 November 1986. The World Heritage List was established under the 1972 UNESCO *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage* that came into force in 1975 and was ratified by the UK in 1984.

The concept and practice of World Heritage is concerned with the identification, protection, conservation and presentation of those parts of the heritage all over the world which, because of their exceptional characteristics and qualities, are considered to be of outstanding universal value. The concept embraces both 'natural' and 'cultural' heritage as two parallel classes of designation, and now, for precisely the reasons we can see operating on our own local area, the idea of 'cultural landscapes' is being pioneered in World Heritage terms. This is not so much to cover a grey area between the two mainstream designations as to recognise that some of the world's most interesting places are actually those resulting from interaction between people and their environment (von Droste *et al.* 1995).

In World Heritage terms, cultural landscapes fall into three main categories (World Heritage Committee 1995, paras 35-42, reproduced in von Droste *et al.*, 431-2, Annex II, and also discussed with reference in part to Britain in Fowler 1998a): (i) 'landscapes designed and created intentionally by man'; (ii) 'the organically evolved landscape', a category which sub-divides into two types, a relict or fossil landscape, and a continuing landscape; and (iii) 'the associative cultural landscape' which does not concern us here.

Category (i) is self-evident, for great designed gardens and parklands are common to many cultures through time; but there is chink in the certainty because many whole functional landscapes, like the agrarian arrangements on 2nd millennium BC Dartmoor, are quite as much 'designed and created intentionally by man' as Stowe and Stourhead. And they are rather bigger in scale too.

The relict landscape of Category (ii) is a familiar concept, exemplified in many parts of upland Britain and notably, because of their publication, on Dartmoor and Bodmin Moor (Fleming 1988, Johnson 199%). That we in the British Isles have in our patrimony such remarkable examples should not blind us to their significance as a global resource for, particularly those of the 2nd millennium BC, the phenomenon is something of a rarity on a world scale (Fowler and Jacques 1995). The 'continuing landscape'-type is both obvious and more subtle, though the definition is quite clear: 'it retains an active social role in contemporary society closely associated with the traditional way of life, and in which the evolutionary process is still in progress.' At first glance, the downs over the north of our Fyfod study area might well be thought merely a relict landscape, an excellent archaeological landscape of high quality preservation, but now 'dead', its development expired. This study has surely dispelled such a view: the downs are alive, still evolving as landscape in their use and perception. Particularly when linked spatially and conceptually to their parochial and sub-regional context, as we have attempted, then clearly Fyfield and Overton Downs retain 'an active and social role in contemporary society because 'the evolutionary process' is still very much in progress.' They represent 'a continuing landscape'. Admittedly that landscape is no longer ploughed in prehistoric fields but it cannot be dismissed as not 'continuing' on such grounds which moved into the past tense two and a half thousand years ago. It continues with its truly traditional land-uses which are pasture, recreation and race-horse training.

The inclusion of a site on the World Heritage List is not in itself an instrument of planning control in the UK, but it does signal to everyone its particular importance.

Designation endows it with a significance which raises it above purely local considerations, yet at the same time charges local interests with a considerable responsibility on behalf of the world community (Boniface and Fowler 1993; Boniface 1995). Everybody, in other words, who deals with the site should do so with respect (above p.00). Obviously this applies in particular to public bodies, like the National Trust, statutory agencies such as The Countryside Commission, and perhaps above all to Local Planning Authorities who are required to accept World Heritage status as a material factor to be taken into account in determining a planning application, or to the Secretary of State for the National Heritage (or equivalents in Scotland and N. Ireland) in determining a case on appeal, or following call-in. This principle is now enshrined, not in statute, but in PPG 15 (1995), the nearest that World Heritage designation has so far come to formal, official recognition in the UK. **GET ITS PROPER REF AND QUOTE THE ONE SPOT-ON PARA FROM IT.**

The importance of World Heritage status is conveniently outlined in the *Operational Guidelines* (World Heritage Committee 1995). Two of its paragraphs are particularly important for our area:

'The cultural heritage and the natural heritage are among the priceless and irreplaceable possessions, not only of each nation, but of mankind as a whole. The loss, through deterioration or disappearance, of any of these most prized possessions constitutes an impoverishment of the heritage of all the peoples in the world' (para. 1).

'The Convention provides for the protection of those cultural and natural properties deemed to be of outstanding universal value. It is not intended to provide for the protection of all properties of great interest, importance or value, but only for a select list of the most outstanding of those from an international viewpoint' (para. 6 (i)).

The World Heritage guidelines are placed in a wider and more practical context by Feilden and Jokilehto (1993), some of whose principles and advice are worth repeating here:

'xi. The enjoyment of our heritage depends upon its conservation.

11. ... the final aim and the principles of conservation and restoration must be kept in mind; generally the minimum effective intervention has proved to be the best policy.

15. Historic areas and their surroundings require particularly careful study and consideration since individual monuments and historic buildings are only part of the larger ensemble of the heritage resource.

23. The inevitable contradictions of the planning process should be resolved first by examining the implications of all viable alternatives and then deciding which is least harmful to the significance of the heritage site.

60. All conservation treatments ... should guarantee the protection of the authenticity of the heritage site, prolonging the duration of its integrity and preparing it for interpretation.

73. Treatment of a site will affect the overall setting and values that have been formed and evolved through the historical process.

74. Encroachment and intrusive commercial development are typical threats that must be addressed...'

Three Local Public Enquiries in recent years served *inter alia* to bring into focus the whole question of the Avebury area's World Heritage designation and the significance of that status. A seminal conference to address those questions and place the designated Avebury landscape in a wider context was held in November, 1995 (Chadburn and Swanton **1998**), ICOMOS UK reviewed the management needs of the World Heritage Site during 1995, The National Trust produced its own Management Plan for its Avebury Estate in 1997 (National Trust 1997), and English Heritage is leading the preparation of a World Heritage Site management plan for consultation in 1998.

Understandably, however, reservations exist about the argument that this status and its consequences should take priority over all other policies within the Avebury World Heritage Site. Nevertheless, the argument should bear strongly on all public policies, especially those at strategic level and for the longer term. Hadrian's Wall, for example, as another World Heritage Site has come in 1996 to possess a management plan which looks at time frames of the next 5 and 30 years (English Heritage 1996). For such attitudinal developments to occur in managing the Avebury landscape, three changes are highly desirable:

- i. Avebury should be separated from Stonehenge and become a World Heritage Site in its own right
- ii. The boundaries of the Avebury World Heritage Site should be very carefully redrawn.
- iii. The Avebury World Heritage Site should be re-classified as a 'cultural landscape'

The case for such changes is outlined in Fowler and Stabler (1998) and discussed in Fowler (1998b). Here, therefore, we concentrate on the second proposed change, the boundaries of the Avebury World Heritage Site, and only on the east along the boundaries of Fyfield and Clatford. This whole matter of World Heritage status is of importance to the Fyfield and Overton landscape and its management. Conversely, and

the more weighty justification for this doubtless seeming diversion to Avebury and global rather than parochial affairs, Fyfield and Overton are vital to considerations of any redefinition of the area of the World Heritage Site. The issue is one presumably integral to the development of the World Heritage Site Management Plan. How, after all, can it be decided how to manage unless your boundaries are secure? On the east, they are not, neither on the ground nor, and arguably even more importantly, in terms of intellectual justification.

The World Heritage Site's eastern marches include quite large areas of the two parishes (fig. 16.1). The boundary, however, makes no sense topographically or archaeologically or managerially. For most of its way it does not follow a line which is readily identifiable on the ground. It runs right across the ancient landscapes and the straightforward archaeology of Fyfield and Overton Downs in a way which is both impractical and intellectually unacceptable. It splits the area of the Scheduled Ancient Monument and of the National Nature Reserve, as well as ignoring farm boundaries and therefore the opportunity to work with the occupiers of the land. A new eastern boundary is, therefore, required, either pulling right back to somewhere much closer to Avebury or facing the landscape reality adduced in this volume. Neither the World Heritage Committee nor some considerable body of public opinion would now be likely to accept the first option which, in any case, retreats from the original idea of including some of the area of sarsens from which the Avebury megaliths presumably came.

A conclusion from the Fyfod Project, obviously, is to prefer the second option, that the eastern extent of the World Heritage Site should be enlarged (fig. 16.2) to a culturally meaningful boundary. The World Heritage Site so redefined on its east would be justifiable academically, defensible politically and workable managerially. It would also make a big step forward towards meeting one of the objectives of World Heritage (*above*): it would make sense in terms of presentation and interpretation. The Site, over and above its closely-related sarsen stone and megalithic interest, would include an extent of landscape which was explicable as an entity in terms of its visible archaeology.

Finale

World Heritage Sites have become, perhaps elsewhere more than in Britain, very much one of the icons of the late 20th century. We create our own versions, not so much of the several hundred Wonders of the Modern World as of 'sacred places' and even 'sacred landscapes'. The core of our study area was in or on the edge of an undoubtedly sacred landscape some 4000 years ago, though we can but wonder about the sort of sanctity. We can also wonder what is really going on in **1989??** when, beside

one of the nodal points in that landscape, the world's largest conservation organisation buys a transport café to demolish it (Pl. 00) and restore its site and lorry park to grass (Pl. 00). A landscape of designation is not just lines on maps; it is something not there, it is grassland where there was ploughland, it is derelict buildings which no-one dare touch, it is downland so precious you hardly dare breathe, it is a proliferation of countryside labels (Pl. 00). Perhaps it was previously thus in another 20th century, and the idea of a 'sacred geography' - for that is what we are creating in our 'landscapes of designation', - has quietly persisted to re-emerge after four thousand years. Is that just conceivably one interpretation of the site of a destroyed transport cafe beside the Neolithic Sanctuary on Overton Hill, near the crossings of Roman road, A4 and The Ridgeway, and at a place which is now the starting point, or end, of a National Trail to make a journey across landscapes?

We end by occupying much lower ground and, like the poet (Eliot 19***, p. 00), where we began, in this case high on the Downs. We asked a long time ago (*above* p. 00) 'To what extent do Fyfield and Overton Downs typify the chalk downlands of southern England?' It is an important question, for in the answer to it probably lies some justification, if such there has to be, for this increasingly personal landscape journey. Geologically, geomorphologically and in some respects botanically these Downs are unusual, even remarkable, as their NNR status indicates (English Nature 1991): so there is one answer. Archaeologically, they are outstanding in their state of preservation: so there is another. These Downs are not typical on two counts.

It was an initial premise of the Project on the Downs, however, that the study was worth carrying out precisely because, despite the strikingly visual and extensive nature of the earthworks, the archaeology was indeed typical of what had once been common over other downland areas in Wessex. Nothing has happened to change that view; rather has it been reinforced. There are minor *caveats*. These Downs do not contain, as far as is known, examples of certain types of site recognised elsewhere on other downs e.g. a henge, cursus or 'banjo' enclosure; nor in general do they contain unique examples of types of sites unknown elsewhere, though it is difficult at the moment to think of exact comparanda for the Roman barrows by the Ridgeway (Smith and Simpson 1964), the settlement sites Overton Down XII and by Wroughton Copse, or Down Barn and Delling Enclosures. Those exceptions are all, it will be noted, post-prehistoric, suggesting that the prehistoric field archaeology of these Downs, though without some monument types, is to a useful degree typical. Rather than further suggesting that the area is especially significant for its Roman and later field archaeology, rather would that list indicate that study of downland field archaeology of the last two millennia is less well-

advanced than for earlier times. Overall, though, these Downs are a very good display case of Wessex field archaeology, and excavation has shown their buried archaeology to be also both typical and a valuable scientific resource.

Whether the history is typical is a different matter. In detail, doubtless these Downs, as does anywhere, enjoy their own idiosyncrasies of periodical developments. The late prehistoric grassland, Roman field systems and medieval settlement witnessed here do not all occur on every piece of Wiltshire downland and certainly not in stratified succession. But each is known individually elsewhere. Generally, it can only be guessed that overall the downland history here follows a common experience. That seems to be the case from 1086 onwards (VCH *passim*; Hare in Chap.14) and an ebb and flow of the extent and nature of land-use in earlier millennia similar to the that on these Downs can be expected to have occurred elsewhere. It is hoped that the interpretation of the history of Fyfield and Overton Downs proposed here can act as a model, a test-bed, for histories of downland elsewhere.

The fundamental point, however, is the existence not just of lots of old earthworks spread out across the landscape but of their existence on the ground in a matrix of chronological, functional and cultural relationships. The surface of the Downs is, in archaeological jargon, a palimpsest, impressed with the evidence of how people have been using this land for thousands of years. This Project may not have come up with the correct answers nor the right interpretations but it has demonstrated that we can do more than just look and wonder; we can actually sort out in a reasonably rational way the sort of stories that such a palimpsest can tell. That is a very important piece of knowledge in itself, grasped at by many before Fyfod and amplified many times over since.

The Fyfield and Overton palimpsest and the range of sites and features that are its components are indeed typical of what once was common on the Wessex Downs; though it would require a separate discussion as to whether that 'once' was before 1660, when Aubrey was complaining about archaeological destruction, before the later 18th century when Stukeley was fulminating on the same matter, before the 1870s and '80s when Long and Smith were horrified at what was happening to the Downs, or before 1940 in field archaeology's 'golden age' of agricultural depression when Crawford viewed and Grinsell strode the turf-rich Wessex downs (**Crawford 19// - his autobiography, Fowler 1972, Grinsell 199?-his autobiography, Long 0000, Smith 18££, Ucko *et al.* 19****). Nevertheless, it is a typicality now demonstrated not just by what is known to be on these Downs but also by a plethora of other landscape-oriented

archaeology throughout the generation spanned by the Project e.g. RCHME's air photographic exposition of the Danebury area, Hampshire (**Palmer 198%**), **and its voluminous coverage of Dorset (5 vols + dates), followed up on the South Dorset Ridgeway by Woodward 19^^ and in Cranborne Chase by Bowen 19** and Barrett, Bradley etc 19££ (reviewed overall in Fowler 199+); and by RCHME's similar fieldwork, partly forthcoming, in Wiltshire, where recent and current work by TWA and the County Council Archaeological Unit makes the same point.**

In general, then, Fyfield and Overton Downs are not archaeologically unusual. It is that typicality which makes them so precious now, not just in their own archaeological survival but because so much of that of which they were typical is no longer accessible. Sadly, much of the field archaeology of, for example, the Danebury area, the South Dorset Ridgeway, Cranborne Chase and whole extents of Wiltshire's downland, especially the Marlborough Downs, no longer exists. A lot of it has been ploughed over during the very same decades that, untypical in their survival, Fyfield and Overton Downs have consequently become a less common habitat and consequentially more valuable for their representative quality of former land-use. They now possess a rare archaeological value, of national and probably at least European significance, in that they are both *sui generis* AND typical of Chalk downland, not only locally but, more generally, of Wessex. Fyfield and Overton Downs, now viewable in at least facets of their parochial context, not only preserve the typical but also make available a telescoped version, an encapsulation, of the landscape archaeology of the Wessex downs. With the rest of their parishes, they represent, illuminate and, thankfully, question, the archaeology and history of the whole of Wessex' landscape, both on and off the downland, plotted and pieced.