

Pursuing ‘the Pressure of the Past’: British Prehistoric Research, 1980–2010

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This article presents a detailed analysis of developments in British prehistoric research practices from 1980–2010, traversing the period during which Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (PPG16) was introduced and changed substantially the way that archaeology was carried out. Using evidence from Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society (PPS) itself together with key fieldwork records collated over the duration of this period, a consideration is made of changes in the character of prehistoric investigations, in the evidence base available to researchers, and in the methodologies drawn upon and interpretations put forward in significant outputs of British prehistoric research. Several major shifts in research practices are highlighted. The findings augment considerably broad claims which have been made about the changing character of British prehistoric research practices and reveal some perhaps surprising traits of the investigative process. PPS’s own role within this broader research milieu is also assessed.

INTRODUCTION

In 1984, in an article entitled ‘The pressure of the past’, Geoff Wainwright, then president of the Prehistoric Society, presented an urgent review of key issues in British archaeology, together with an in-depth analysis of how shifts in funding practices at the very beginning of the 1980s had affected the kinds of prehistoric evidence which were being investigated. He bemoaned the absence of reliable data at this time even for monuments protected by scheduling, let alone for archaeological sites more broadly (*ibid.*, 4). He also noted how the government’s then Department of the Environment’s switch from allocating block-funding to archaeological organisations to financing specific projects had changed the types of evidence produced (*ibid.*, 20). Almost 30 years later, British archaeology is once again in a state of rapid transition, with the economic downturn forcing the restructuring of major institutions and the processes through which archaeological sites are investigated. It is therefore apt to reconnect with Wainwright’s insights by considering what has changed in British

prehistoric research over the ensuing era, from 1980–2010 – a period for which data relating to archaeological sites of all kinds has been collated much more systematically, and during which British prehistory research has undoubtedly been affected further by substantial shifts in the funding, structure and social context of archaeology, and in the methodologies and interpretations available. Detailed accounts of many such broad changes are widely available (eg, Andrews & Doonan 2003; Evans & Daly 2006; Hunter & Ralston 2006; Johnson 2010; Lucas 2001). However for readers unfamiliar with recent organisational shifts in British archaeology it is worth highlighting that one seminal development between 1980–2010 was the implementation of PPG16 in 1990 (DoE 1990). This legislation essentially embedded the investigation of archaeological sites threatened by development within the planning process; a shift which had major ramifications not only for how archaeological fieldwork was funded in Britain (increasingly primarily by developers) but also for how it was initiated, justified and undertaken, for who carried out fieldwork investigations, and for how the results were ultimately presented (see Darvill *et al.* 2002 for a detailed summary of these effects at a broad level).

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This article comprises two main parts. The first is an empirical study of shifts in the character of fieldwork and of the prehistoric evidence base itself over the last 30 years. The second is a critical assessment of changes – methodological, interpretative, etc – in British prehistoric research practices more broadly, as they are evident in a set of key research outputs: *PPS* articles. Overall, the analysis verifies and develops further some of the broad, mostly conjectural claims which have been made with regards to these topics in recent years. It highlights ways in which researchers in British prehistory have actually engaged with wider disciplinary changes during this era. Additionally, since *PPS* itself was used as a primary analytical source, the changing role of this journal in the context of research in British prehistory is considered. While the findings are of immediate interest to British prehistorians, given that researchers in many other countries have witnessed similar changes in practice, they also have resonance much more broadly.

Existing accounts

To begin, it is worth reviewing briefly existing discussions of this topic. A wide range of researchers in various different forums – from conference papers to key synthetic texts – have commented upon broad changes in the evidence base for British prehistoric research. Importantly, however, these discussions have typically been based upon inference or conjecture rather than on detailed analytical research. Consequently, a somewhat incongruous picture has been painted of recent shifts in fieldwork practices, both in prehistory and more broadly. For instance, in a recent volume on *Prehistoric Britain*, Pollard highlighted the impressive increase in the scale of excavation that has taken place since the introduction of *PPG16*, which, he suggested, has been witnessed most dramatically in the economically ‘super-charged’ regions of the East Midlands and the Thames Valley (2008, 12). By contrast, in their account of ‘British archaeology since the end of the Second World War’ Hunter and Ralston proposed that changes in fieldwork practices since 1980 were characterised by ‘a significant trend away from large-scale excavation’ (2009, 11).

The main publication arising thus far from the Archaeological Investigations Project (see below for description), *Archaeology after PPG16: Archaeological Investigations in England 1990–1999*,

provided a more rigorous examination of ‘the changing character and distribution of archaeological work in England since the introduction of *PPG16*’ (Darvill *et al.* 2002, 3). However, this analysis focused on shifts in the character of archaeological ‘interventions’ (which in this case included desk-based assessments, as well as excavations, field evaluations, etc) at an abstract level. It highlighted changes in the number, scale, etc, of interventions, rather than also in the kinds of materials and interpretations they produced, as is the intention here¹. Bradley’s recent synthesis, *The Prehistory of Britain and Ireland* (2007), which collated evidence both from published and ‘grey’ literature, placed him in an excellent and uniquely-informed position to comment upon such issues. Nonetheless Bradley’s analysis necessarily focused predominantly on exceptional evidence, rather than upon the prehistoric evidence base at a broad level. Moreover the data he gathered were not quantified: although Bradley generated a range of highly pertinent and important impressions of recent shifts in prehistoric evidence, he was not able to verify these in detail. For the purposes of this research it was necessary, therefore, to undertake primary analysis of records pertaining to what prehistoric fieldwork has actually been carried out from 1980–2010, and the data this has yielded.

No previous attempt has been made to consider concertedly how prehistoric researchers have actually engaged with broader disciplinary developments. For instance, while British prehistorians are widely perceived to have led the way in terms of interpretative advances over the latter part of the 20th century, the vital question of how researchers have, in practice, engaged with and drawn upon a range of available interpretative possibilities has not yet been raised.

PREHISTORIC FIELDWORK

This account of prehistoric fieldwork since 1980 is based on evidence collated from two main sources: *PPS* excavation summaries for the period from 1980–1990, and the Archaeological Investigations Project (AIP) database for the period from 1990 onwards. In order to keep the sample size manageable (especially with the aim of carrying out qualitative analysis), both of these sources were consulted at five-yearly intervals (in 1980, 1985, 1990, and so on)².

To summarise briefly the main attributes of these sources (for further details see Cooper 2010), the annual summaries of excavation reports in *PPS* comprise lists of abstracts outlining the findings of fieldwork investigations in Britain (England, Scotland, and Wales) for that year which had either sought or produced prehistoric archaeology. Excavation summaries were published intermittently in *PPS* throughout the late 20th century. However they were published continuously from 1977–1980 and from 1982–1985 and were consequently almost certainly compiled more systematically during this period. A total of 111 projects which produced prehistoric evidence were listed for 1980 and 1985. The AIP database comprises a comprehensive record of all 'grey' literature arising from archaeological investigations in England published between 1990 and 2008 (at the time of writing data for 2009 and 2010 were not available). In contrast to the *PPS* excavation summaries, the AIP provides information about fieldwork projects which were *published* rather than *undertaken* in any given year. Additionally it provides information only about investigations in England, rather than from across Britain (comparable data from the rest of Britain and Ireland were not readily available). The AIP lists almost 7800 projects which produced prehistoric evidence in England from 1990–2005.

Overall, it is worth emphasising that both of these sources have limitations in terms of the kinds and scope of information which they are able to provide (for further details see Cooper 2010, 89–90). Nevertheless the records of prehistoric fieldwork between 1980–2010 which were collated for the purposes of this analysis are as full as they reasonably could be³.

In the following account, the main topics broached include shifts in:

- the geographical distribution of projects
- the methodologies employed
- the kinds of sites recorded
- the working contexts of those responsible for undertaking the work.

Ideally, an assessment would also have been made of shifts in the scale of prehistoric fieldwork. As noted above, this is a topic which has been widely commented upon but about which there is little clear consensus. Such an analysis was precluded, however,

by the fact that the scale of investigations (ie, the size of area examined within trenches, excavation areas etc.) was, perhaps surprisingly, not recorded systematically in either of the two main sources.

For each of the principal criteria, a summary is provided first of the situation in the early 1980s (in 1980 and 1985) using fieldwork data from across Britain (111 investigations in total). Following this, an assessment is made of how the situation changed from 1980 to 2005. In making this assessment, where feasible, data from across England are drawn upon. However due to the high volume of projects involved (402 investigations in total for 1980 and 2005), when considering more complex shifts – in the character of evidence and the methodologies employed – it was necessary to adopt a sampling strategy. In these cases, a comparison is made of fieldwork data from 1980 and 2005 from two of England's nine administrative regions (Fig. 1). The two regions selected for detailed consideration – the 'East of England' (including Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Norfolk, and Suffolk) and 'North West England' (including Cheshire, Cumbria, Greater Manchester, Lancashire, and Merseyside) – were chosen in part for their geographical distinctiveness. They also represent one of the busiest and one of the quietest regions respectively in terms of prehistoric fieldwork activity: in 2005, 101 projects in the 'East' and four in the 'North West' produced prehistoric remains. Overall, a total of 13 investigations took place in these two regions in 1980, and 105 investigations in 2005 (roughly a quarter of those for England as a whole). In order to avoid repetition, other than in relation to specific points, commentary and contextual information relating to the main analytical findings are provided in the concluding discussion.

Scope

To begin, it is important to bear in mind that, as Darvill *et al.* (2002) have demonstrated previously, there was undoubtedly a dramatic shift in the overall amount of fieldwork taking place between 1980–2005, particularly following the introduction of *PPG16* in 1990 (Fig. 2). According to records from the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments Excavation Index (RCHMEI) (see <http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/catalogue/collections/blurbs/304.cfm> for a summary of this source) and the AIP, the number of excavations taking place annually in



Fig. 1.
English regions examined in detail
(following Alexander 1999)

England rose by up to four times after 1992 compared to the average number for the preceding 30 years. Even before considering changes in the scale of investigations over the same period, this represents a marked shift in the scope of prehistoric fieldwork.

Geographical distribution

The main point to stress with regards to the geographical distribution of prehistoric fieldwork in the early 1980s is that in terms of density, the majority of work was concentrated in southern and eastern England (Fig. 3). Otherwise, a fairly low but even spread of projects was recorded across Britain. One important element of this patterning is that the areas of England in which the greatest density of prehistoric fieldwork took place at this time (the south and east) were also those in which the greatest density of

development – the construction of new buildings, changes of land use etc. – has traditionally taken place (AIP 2008a, Fig. 5). Significantly, this suggests that development was a major factor determining where prehistoric investigations took place well before the widespread advent of developer-funded archaeology from 1990 onwards.

The changes which ensued between 1980 and 2005 are more complex to interpret. Viewed at the level of English Heritage administrative regions (Alexander 1999), there were substantial shifts in the overall distribution of prehistoric fieldwork over this period (Fig. 4). Marked rises occurred in the proportion of investigations taking place in the East Midlands and in Eastern England (of 8% and 9% respectively) and smaller falls took place in the proportion of investigations taking place in the North East, the West Midlands, Yorkshire and Humberside, the South West and the South East of England (of 3%, 3%, 6%, 2%, and 4% respectively).

Once examined beyond the level of individual regions, however, it is clear that in other respects, changes which have occurred in the distribution of prehistoric fieldwork have been relatively limited (Fig. 5). Importantly, the increase which has taken place in the proportion of investigations being carried out in the area (including the South East, the South West, and the East of England and in Greater London) which traditionally has the highest levels of development, and which includes sub-regions that have habitually been a focus for prehistoric research (eg, Wessex, East Anglia, the South Downs) has been relatively slight: 71% of prehistoric investigations took place in this broad area in 1980, rising to 75% in 2005. Conversely, the distribution of fieldwork producing prehistoric evidence has fallen slightly within the broader area (including the North West, the North East and the East of England, the West Midlands, and Yorkshire and Humberside) which conventionally has lower levels of development: 29% of prehistoric investigations took place in this broad area in 1980, falling to 25% in 2005. Viewed at this level therefore, only modest changes have taken place in the distribution of prehistoric investigations over the period in question. Indeed, if anything, prehistoric fieldwork has become increasingly focused in areas in which it was already well-established in 1980.

In fact, perhaps the most striking change which has taken place in this respect is that the principal focus of prehistoric investigations has expanded northwards

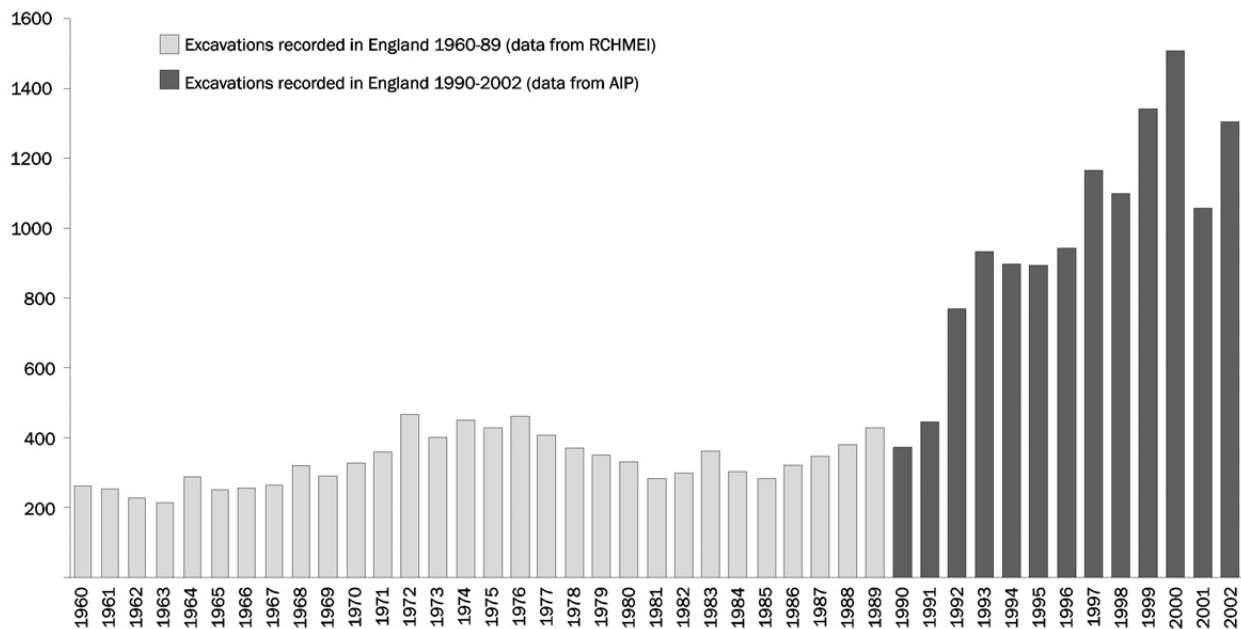


Fig. 2. Overall number of excavations in England, 1960–2002 (redrawn from Darvill *et al.* 2002, 53)

slightly from the South East and South West regions of England (where 48% of prehistoric investigations undertaken across the whole of England were recorded in 1980 falling to 42% in 2005), to Greater London, the East and the East Midlands (where 29% of prehistoric investigations undertaken across the whole of England were recorded in 1980, rising to 48% in 2005). It is also likely that the geographical distribution of prehistoric fieldwork has shifted *within* EH regions – for instance onto different types of geology and into different topographical zones. Unfortunately however, it was not possible to investigate such patterning using the available evidence.

Methodologies

Excavation was by far the predominant methodology applied in relation to prehistoric evidence in the early 1980s: 90% of projects in 1980 and 1985 involved some form of excavation – whether in trenches, across an open area, or more rarely during the course of a watching brief (Fig. 6).⁴ Survey (topographic, geophysical, auger, or fieldwalking) was the other common fieldwork activity: it was employed in 24%

of projects, mostly in conjunction with excavation. Meanwhile, watching briefs, trial trenches, and test-pits were used only occasionally.

This situation undoubtedly changed dramatically over the ensuing period, due largely to factors associated with the introduction of PPG16. Darvill *et al.* (2002) discuss this movement in detail for fieldwork in general during the period from 1990–1999. However it is important to consider here the specific implications of this shift for British prehistoric research. Interestingly, in the two regions examined in detail, by 2005 excavation was employed much more sparingly than it was in 1980, on only 20% of projects which produced prehistoric evidence (Fig. 7). Instead, by this time, trial trenching was the primary way in which prehistoric evidence was encountered, with watching briefs playing a further significant role: these two approaches were employed on 65% and 19% of projects respectively. In connection with this rise in the use of speculative fieldwork techniques, new methodological variants such as ‘strip-map-and-sample’ (a cursory mode of excavation) and ‘archaeological monitoring’ (an enhanced form of watching brief) had been defined by

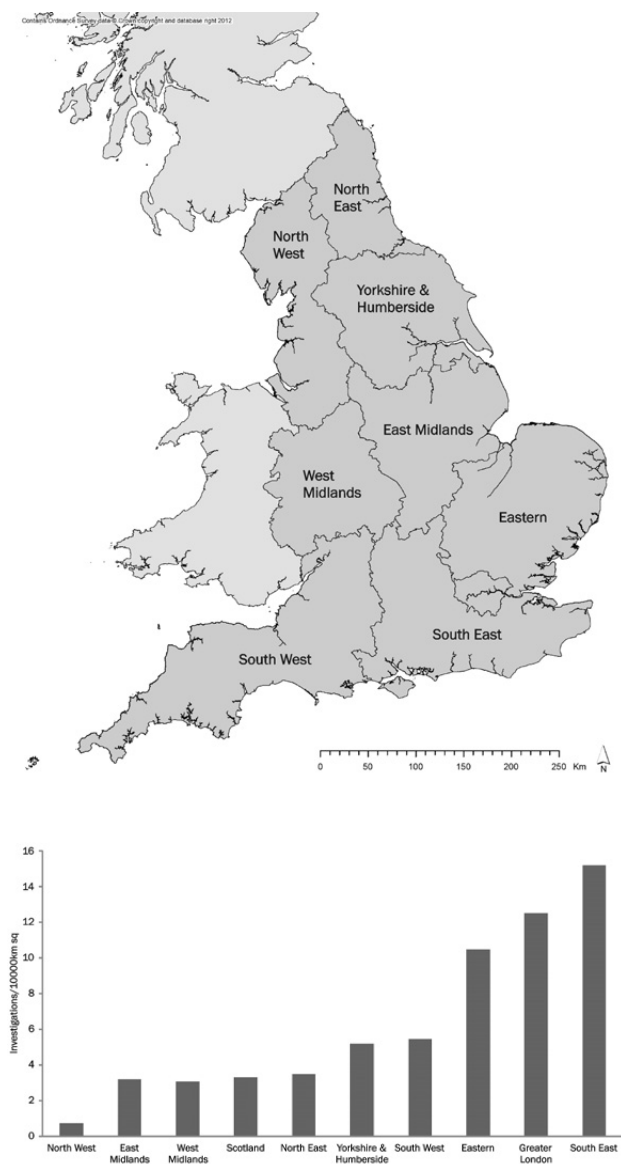


Fig. 3.
Distribution of prehistoric fieldwork investigations undertaken in each government/EH administrative region in 1980 & 1985

2005. By contrast survey techniques were employed on a much greater proportion of prehistoric investigations in 1980 than they were in 2005: on 23% and 5% of such projects respectively in the North West and East of England. The main finding to highlight here is that by 2005 a significant amount of British prehistoric evidence was produced

‘inadvertently’ – during the course of speculative work, or using rapid or semi-controlled excavation techniques (typically employed where no substantial remains are expected).

Character of evidence (period and form)

The overarching impression of prehistoric evidence investigated in the early 1980s is that it was very varied (Figs 8 & 9). Fieldwork was undertaken in relation to both specific archaeological features (eg a round barrow) and to more extensive archaeological landscapes (eg parts of a field system or several ‘sites’ within a given investigation area), and unearthed prehistoric remains dating from the Palaeolithic to the end of the Iron Age.

Despite this general diversity, certain prehistoric periods and certain features were investigated much more often than others. For instance, 49% of projects which produced prehistoric remains at this time recorded Iron Age evidence. Similarly, while the full range of features investigated was very broad (artefact scatters, marine deposits, monuments, settlements, isolated features, findspots, etc), the vast majority of projects focused on settlement-related or monumental evidence: 37% of investigations targeted known monuments (represented by the classes ‘Religious, Ritual & Funerary (Monument)’ and ‘Defence’⁵), while, 43% of investigations produced substantial settlement remains (represented by the class ‘Domestic 1’). In many ways, these figures are hardly surprising – Iron Age material is more ubiquitous than that of other prehistoric periods, and settlements and monuments are undoubtedly the most common forms of evidence. However it is perhaps also relevant that these types of prehistoric remains are also the most visible from aerial photographs and the ground surface: their high incidence in fieldwork projects in the early 1980s probably relates as much to their visual prominence (making them easy to target investigatively) as it does to their relative abundance in prehistory.

Two main points stand out with regards to changes in the character of prehistoric evidence produced in fieldwork investigations between 1980–2005 (Fig. 10). First, a slight shift took place in the overall balance of periods recorded. In both 1980 and 2005, the incidence of Bronze and Iron Age evidence was much higher than that for the Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, and Neolithic. However in 2005 Mesolithic and Iron

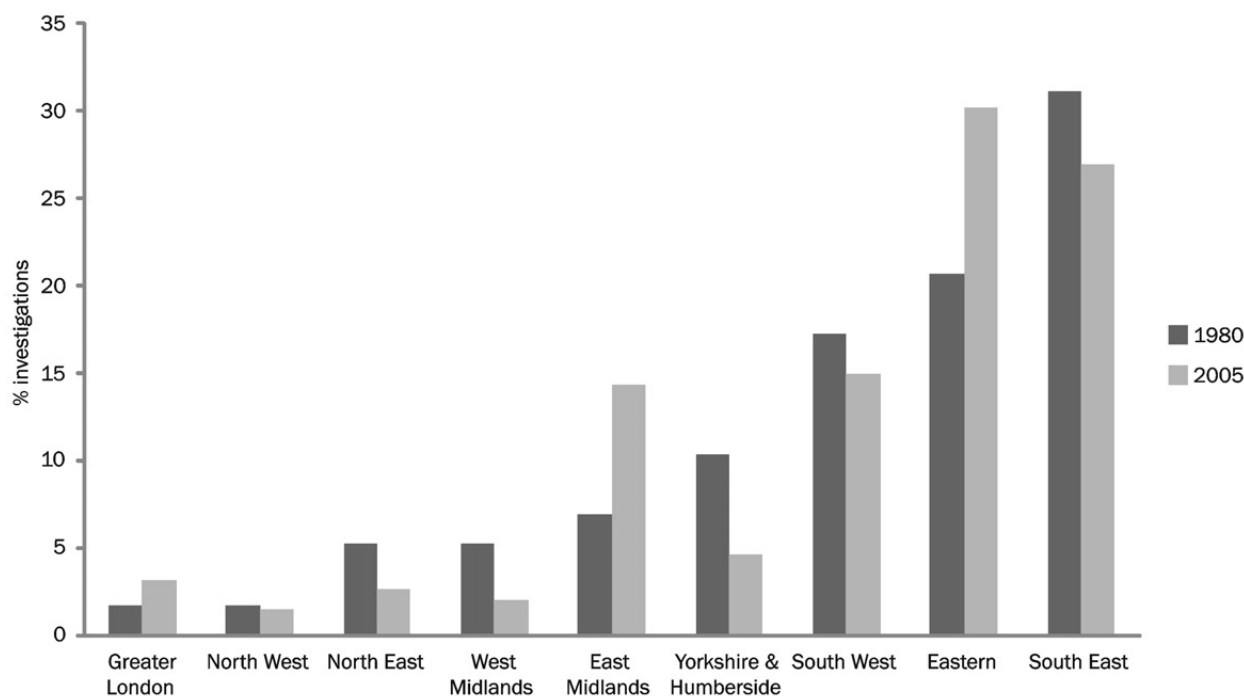


Fig. 4.

Changes in the geographic distribution of (prehistoric) fieldwork 1980–2005 according to EH administrative regions

Age evidence was encountered on a distinctly lower percentage of sites than in 1980, meanwhile no Palaeolithic evidence was encountered at all. By contrast Neolithic and Bronze Age evidence was proportionally slightly more abundant. The absence of any sites producing Palaeolithic material and the fall in the proportion of Mesolithic sites being investigated in 2005 probably relates to the fact that evidence from these periods is notoriously difficult to identify. Accordingly it is less likely to be recorded unless known sites are specifically targeted, as they were more frequently in 1980 before the rise of developer-funded archaeology. Additionally, Palaeolithic material often occurs within the drift geology (eg, gravel) which is to be extracted, rather than on the surface of this material, where most investigations focus. It is also notable that a substantial proportion of prehistoric evidence produced in 2005 was not assigned to any specific period. It is certainly possible that, as understandings of the prehistoric evidence base have matured over the period under analysis, archaeologists have become more cautious about assuming that certain

archaeological features (eg, round-houses) relate exclusively to certain archaeological periods (eg, the Iron Age). Consequently the process of assigning specific 'types' of evidence to a specific period is more commonly deferred pending further investigation.

Secondly, there were marked differences in the forms of prehistoric evidence being investigated (Fig. 11). In both years, settlement remains (including both 'Domestic 1' & 'Domestic 2') were the most commonly investigated site type: such evidence was encountered on 38% of sites in these regions in 1980, and 45% of sites in 2005. However, a considerably lower proportion of investigations in 2005 (only 6% compared with 38% in 1980) focused on monuments (represented by the classes 'Religious, Ritual & Funerary (Monument)' and 'Defence'). Meanwhile other types of evidence, such as field systems (the primary feature type within the class 'Agriculture & Subsistence') were encountered relatively more frequently. It is also notable that a higher proportion of the settlement evidence produced in 2005 fell into the 'Domestic 2' class (ephemeral occupation), than into the 'Domestic 1' class (substantial settlement).

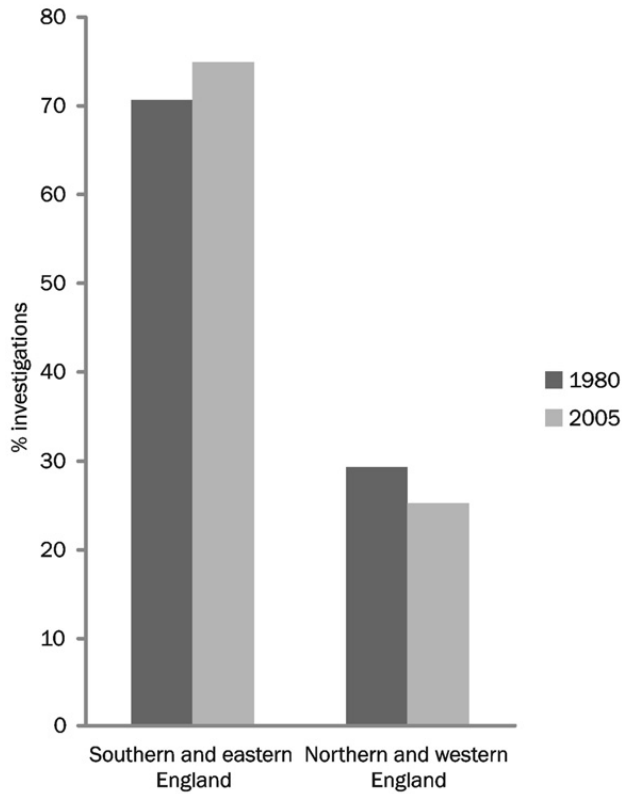


Fig. 5. Broader changes in the geographical distribution of (prehistoric) fieldwork, 1980–2005

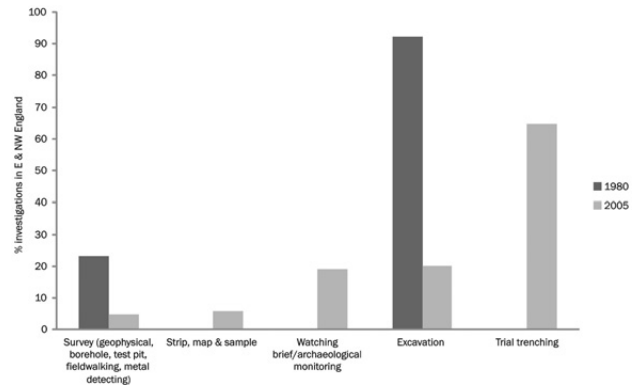


Fig. 7. Changes in the methodologies employed in relation to prehistoric evidence, 1980–2005

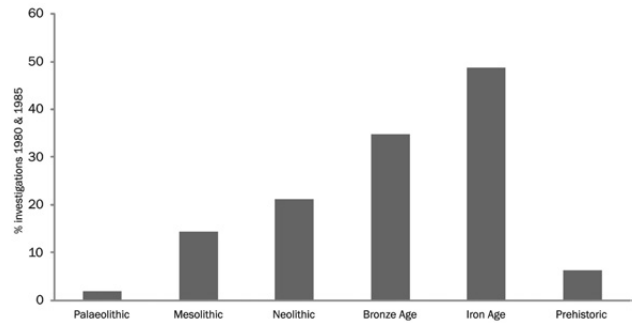


Fig. 8. Periods of prehistoric archaeology investigated, 1980 & 1985

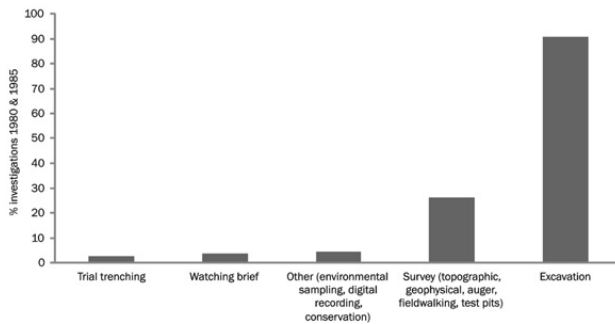


Fig. 6. Methodologies employed in relation to prehistoric evidence, 1980 & 1985

This finding almost certainly relates partly to the fact that in 2005, many ‘Domestic’ sites (of both kinds) would have been encountered in trial trenches rather than in open-area excavations. In such circumstances, only a few features may have been recorded from what was potentially a much more extensive settlement. This evidence would have been assigned to the class ‘Domestic 2’ although had it been excavated fully it would probably have been classified as ‘Domestic 1’. However, even if the data only from open-area excavations are considered for both years (ie, evidence from investigations which revealed a large part or all of the settlement ‘site’ concerned, with the result that its character could be determined more conclusively), a similar pattern is produced (Fig. 12).

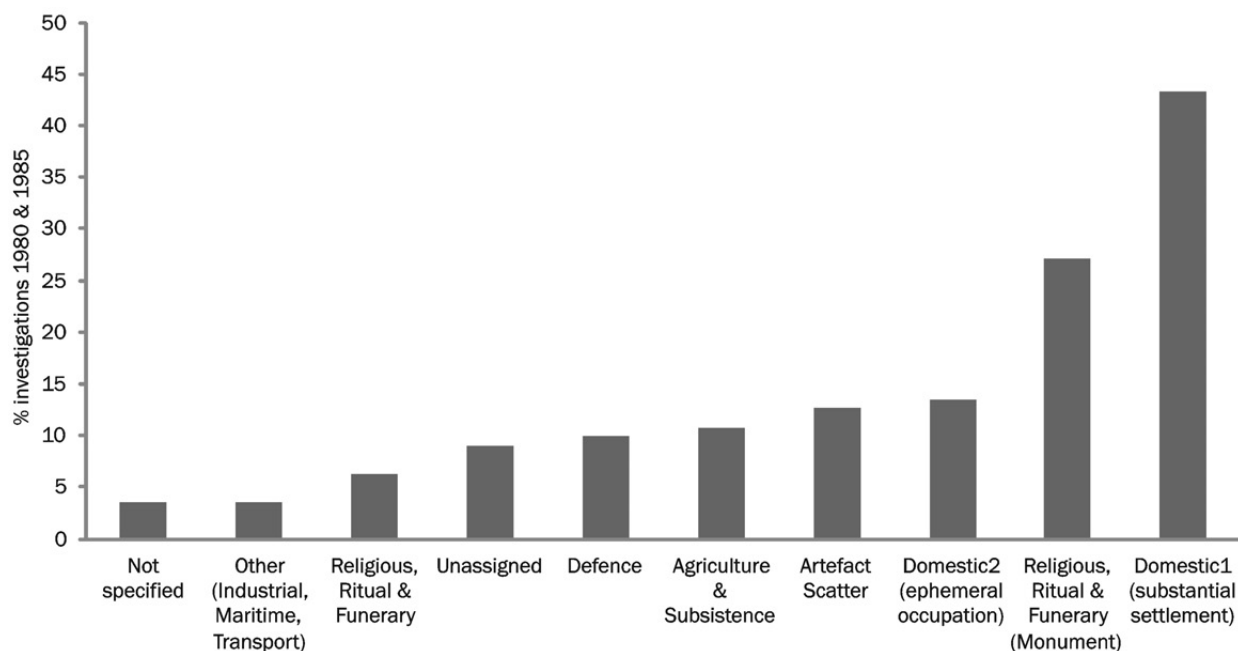


Fig. 9.

Types of prehistoric archaeology investigated, 1980 & 1985 (see endnote 5 for a discussion of the site categories used)

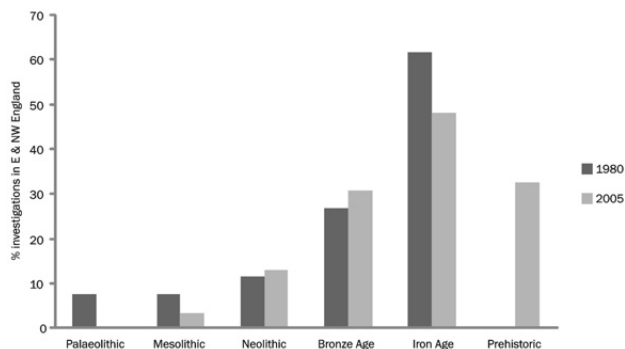


Fig. 10.

changes overall in the periods of prehistoric evidence investigated, 1980–2005

Fieldworkers

The general picture of who was undertaking prehistoric fieldwork in the early 1980s is complex and fragmented – many different groups and individuals were involved situated in many different workplaces (Fig. 13). This included archaeologists within rescue committees, National Museums, the

Central Excavation Unit (CEU), the Department of the Environment (DoE), county councils, development corporations, local societies, specialist excavation units, the Ancient Monuments Laboratory (AML), the Scottish Development Department (SDD), and universities. With regards to how fieldwork was distributed between these organisations, many investigations (at least 65%) were carried out by specialist fieldwork teams (ie, groups whose work almost exclusively involved fieldwork, including independent trusts and fieldwork units, the CEU or specialist groups associated with local authorities, development corporations, etc).⁶ Significantly, however, university- and museum-based archaeologists were also responsible for undertaking a substantial proportion of fieldwork investigations which produced prehistoric remains – they were involved in 12% and 13% of such projects respectively in 1980 and 1985.

With regards to subsequent shifts in the makeup of prehistoric fieldworkers it is clear that by 2005 the vast majority of prehistoric fieldwork (92%) was undertaken by archaeologists in specialist fieldwork units (Fig. 14). Moreover of these fieldwork units, a

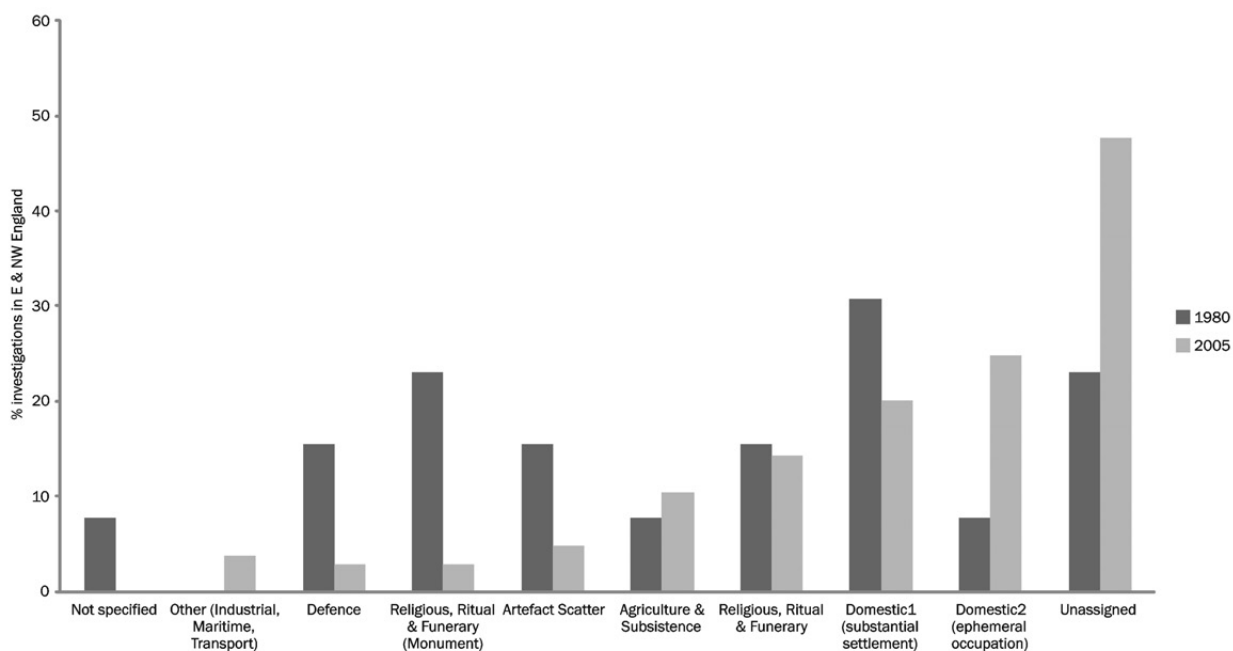


Fig. 11.
Changes in the types of prehistoric evidence investigated, 1980–2005

significant proportion (50%) operated as independent organisations, with county council, university, and museum-affiliated units undertaking 23%, 14%, and 5% prehistoric investigations respectively. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this evidence demonstrates that prehistoric fieldwork was much more specialised in 2005: it was almost always undertaken by teams specifically dedicated to fieldwork, rather than by archaeologists in universities, county councils, the DoE and so on, for whom this activity formed only part of a broader remit. It also suggests that the context in which specialist fieldwork units were situated had altered by this time: by 2005 a much higher proportion of such organisations functioned independently, rather than being tied to larger archaeological or other bodies.

The increasingly specialised nature of fieldwork in British archaeology following the advent of *PPG16* has been discussed elsewhere (eg, Darvill *et al.* 2002, 65). However it is important to consider the specific implications of this movement for British prehistorians, not least because prehistoric remains are arguably often more difficult to identify than those

of most later periods. Viewing this situation in a positive light it seems likely that by 2005, once identified, prehistoric remains were more often excavated by highly competent fieldworkers. However it is certainly possible that, without the direct involvement of period specialists (more usually based in museums and universities), less easily identified forms of prehistoric evidence were more frequently overlooked. Additionally, according to the pressures which commercial fieldwork units face in terms of meeting the demands of developers, the potential exists that by 2005 prehistoric evidence was less often excavated primarily with a view to extracting the best possible research data. To give a simple example, in order to interpret the data to its full potential, a specialist in Neolithic archaeology would require that pits of this date were excavated entirely. However most curatorial briefs for archaeological work undertaken through the planning process specify that 50% of isolated features such as pits should be excavated. Consequently if a Neolithic pit site is excavated without direct specialist input important data could be lost.

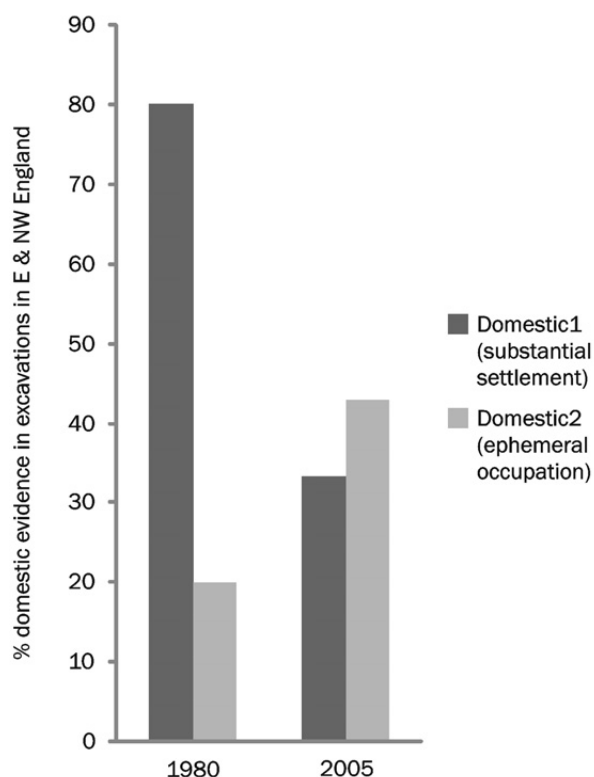


Fig. 12.

Changes in the character of domestic evidence encountered in excavations, 1980–2005

Summary

Overall, it is clear that highly significant shifts have occurred in the character of prehistoric fieldwork investigations in England from 1980–2005. In addition to the substantial increase which has taken place in terms of the number of prehistoric investigations taking place on an annual basis, major changes have transpired with regards to the methods by which prehistoric evidence is encountered, the kinds of prehistoric evidence being produced, and who (in terms of their working context) actually produces these data.

PREHISTORIC RESEARCH MORE BROADLY

In order to consider critically changes in British prehistoric research practices from 1980–2010 from a different angle, detailed analysis was undertaken of

one key set of research outcomes: the main articles in *PPS* (fieldwork reports, artefact analyses, synthetic studies, etc). Clearly, these articles form only part of a continuum of British prehistoric research outcomes over the period in question (other journals, books of various forms, and ‘grey’ literature being other obvious examples). However, given that *PPS* articles pertain to many different forms of enquiry into British prehistory, are written by prehistorians from a variety of backgrounds, and are explicitly intended to convey information about everything of significance in prehistoric research (Chapman 1985, 26), they are certainly the best accessible source for the purposes of this account.

Before explaining how they were addressed analytically, it is important to stress that, while *PPS* is necessarily affected by broader disciplinary trends, it is by no means a passive organ through which changes in British prehistoric research can be straightforwardly observed. Since *PPS* is one of Britain’s leading journals, the articles included are inevitably selective in terms of their representation of British prehistoric research. Moreover *PPS*’s editors and editorial boards have undoubtedly and often necessarily pursued specific agendas (some more explicit than others) throughout the period in question; prioritising the publication of certain types of research over others. Bearing this in mind, certain biases associated with *PPS* might also be viewed as positive attributes of using this particular source: the fact that the main articles foreground *exemplary* research in British prehistory also means that they are potentially a context in which cutting-edge ideas are aired, and in which the effects of broader disciplinary changes become evident more quickly. The exclusive character of this forum makes it ideal for highlighting disparities between, research actually being undertaken, and that being presented to prehistorians more broadly, particularly in the realm of fieldwork. Additionally, given that the contents of *PPS* are peer-reviewed and meant to be representative of the interests of the Prehistoric Society in general, it seems fair to assume that any partialities introduced by particular editors also reflect wider perceptions that such topics needed to be foregrounded.

PPS volumes throughout the period from 1980–2010 were examined (351 articles in total). For the purposes of detailed analysis, however, a sampling strategy was employed: volumes were consulted at five-yearly intervals (Vols 46, 51, 56, 61, 66, 71, & 76).

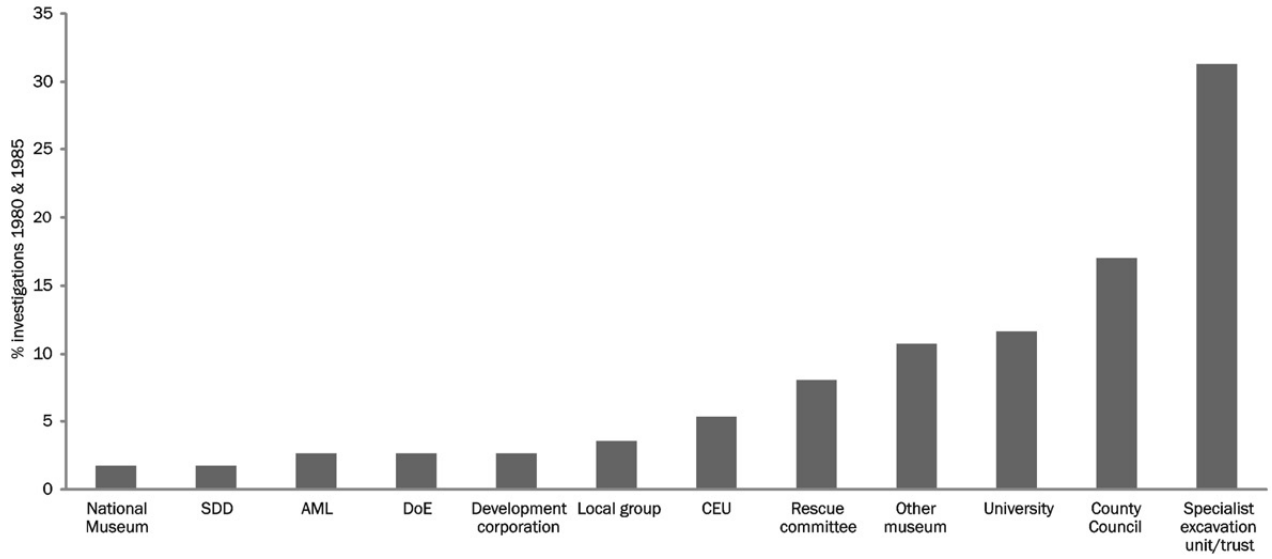


Fig. 13.
Organisations undertaking prehistoric fieldwork, 1980 & 1985

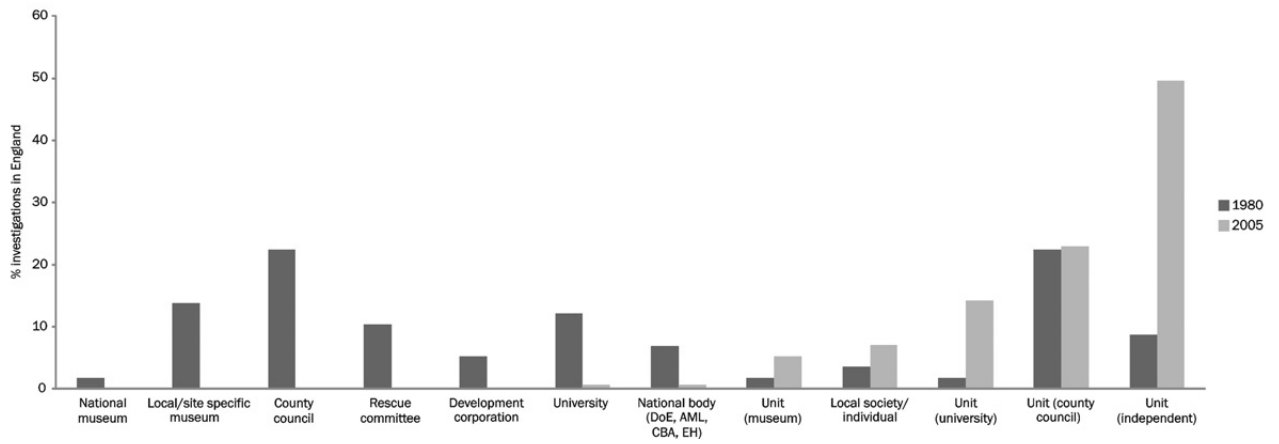


Fig. 14.
Changes in the makeup of prehistoric fieldworkers in England, 1980–2005

Every article relating to British and Irish prehistory within these volumes (76 articles in total) was assessed according to key criteria including:

- the broad character of the article (fieldwork report, synthetic study, etc);
- who was responsible for producing the work (in terms of both individuals and bodies);
- the reasons given for undertaking the investigation;
- the methodologies employed; and
- the principal kinds of interpretation which resulted.

Overall, the main intentions were firstly to consider if and how wider disciplinary changes – interpretative, methodological, etc – have actually become visible within this key set of research outputs over the period in question, and secondly to identify broad shifts in terms of the balance of research and the makeup of researchers who have contributed to this particular forum. The analysis which follows focuses largely on the evidence provided in *PPS* volumes between 1980 and 2005 (to match that undertaken for shifts in prehistoric fieldwork). An additional section updates these findings using evidence from Volume 76, published in 2010.

Fieldwork (and post-excavation analysis)

It is worthwhile considering how prehistoric fieldwork has been presented in research outcomes (as represented by *PPS* articles) as well as in fieldwork records for two main reasons. First, because *PPS* articles showcase 'exemplary' research, they potentially provide a rather different view of recent changes in prehistoric fieldwork to that produced using fieldwork records (the RCHMEI, *PPS* excavation summaries, and the AIP database). This is important because the authoritative and publicly accessible perspectives on prehistoric research which a journal such as *PPS* conveys arguably exert a strong influence over the orientation of research practices. Secondly, the fieldwork-related articles in *PPS* describe prehistoric projects in more detail than fieldwork records. Accordingly, they have the potential to reveal changes in fieldwork practices which are not visible in the latter, and to allow for a consideration of the tempo at which certain changes have been enacted.

Regarding shifts in the geographical coverage of British prehistoric fieldwork projects from 1980–2005, there is a striking difference between those presented in *PPS* and those charted in formal fieldwork records. As mentioned above, evidence from the latter suggests that prehistoric fieldwork investigations have been distributed broadly across Britain throughout this period. However they have always been focused predominantly in regions where there are high levels of development (in southern and eastern England). By contrast, within *PPS*, fieldwork projects featured in the 1980s derive solely from four main regions which have, for a long time, had a strong tradition for prehistoric research: central southern England (Wessex and the Thames Valley), Dartmoor, Yorkshire, and Orkney. During the 1990s fieldwork projects featured in *PPS* derive from a broader geographical area, with investigations in Ireland and Wales featuring prominently. However it was not until the 2000s that *PPS* regularly included reports on fieldwork investigations from right across Britain. As a result, the impression could certainly be gained from *PPS* articles that the geographical focus of fieldwork has broadened dramatically since 1980.

With respect to shifts in the fieldwork approaches employed, further to evidence provided by fieldwork records, *PPS* articles highlight the importance for British prehistorians during the 1980s of developing and applying sampling methods, both for the purpose of post-excavation analysis – charred remains, phosphate, pollen, radiocarbon dating, etc – and for investigating prehistoric landscapes (eg Bedwin & Holgate 1985; Jones 1980; Mellars & Wilkinson 1980; Monk & Fasham 1980). One interesting aspect of this focus is that although the application of such techniques is presented as being relatively cutting-edge at the time, many of them had actually been available in archaeology for some time previously (eg, Orton 2000, 15). Interestingly *PPS* articles provide little evidence of important methodological developments for prehistoric researchers in the 1990s and 2000s. This certainly gives the impression that since the 1980s, the specific methods used in prehistoric fieldwork projects have to a certain extent stabilised.

It is also noteworthy that a temporal disparity of 10–15 years exists between the shifts in excavation practices which are charted in records of prehistoric fieldwork and those which are evident within *PPS* articles.⁷ As outlined above, fieldwork records show that, during the 1980s, investigations primarily

involved surveying extensive landscapes or otherwise cutting small trenches across, around or within previously known features. Meanwhile from about 1990, undoubtedly in relation to the instigation of PPG16, significant prehistoric remains were more commonly encountered within larger, open-area excavations. Within *PPS*, however, this shift in practice is barely evident until the 2000s. Only from this time onwards does the journal regularly include articles presenting the findings from complex multi-period investigations extending over large areas, alongside those from projects which targeted neatly defined features. Almost certainly in relation to this broad methodological change, a shift is also evident from 2000 onwards in the kinds of prehistoric evidence being discussed: subtler features such as Neolithic pit clusters come to the fore (eg, Garrow *et al.* 2005), and detailed yet broad landscape histories are generated on the basis of the findings from just one site (eg, Last 2005).

Additionally, fieldwork-related articles in *PPS* raise a quite different type of reason for actually investigating prehistoric sites to those mentioned in fieldwork records. Throughout the period in question, in both *PPS* articles and fieldwork records, the research rationale given for undertaking fieldwork are fairly consistent. They typically include investigating the basic character of prehistoric sites (chronologies, sequence, date, etc), examining issues such as temporality of occupation, primary function, economy, environmental sequence, landscape setting, or spatial organisation of sites, and exploring methodological issues. However, in the 2000s, several fieldwork projects in *PPS* were also carried out specifically in order to investigate interpretative issues. Projects were undertaken with the explicit intention of assessing landscape perceptions, the movement of prehistoric people in relation to architectural features or the landscape more broadly, instances of plural or contested meanings, the role of structured deposition, or evidence for social exclusion (eg, Chapman 2005; Kirk & Williams 2000; Last 2005).

PPS has not been a forum in which new methods for studying archaeological materials (eg, Andrews & Doonan 2003; Evans & Daly 2006; Jones 2002) have commonly been showcased (see also Chapman 1985, 27). This is understandable given that *PPS* is certainly not the only forum in which exemplary prehistoric research is published. For instance within the field of Palaeolithic archaeology, the *Quaternary Science*

Reviews and the *Journal for Quaternary Science* provide alternative high-profile contexts. Indeed the only notable developments in this respect within the articles analysed in detail were that, unsurprisingly (given the increasing accessibility and interpretative potential of this technique (eg, Bayliss & Bronk Ramsey 2004)), radiocarbon dating has been used much more frequently as time has progressed. Additionally, the application of lithological and biological analysis, oxygen-isotope analysis, and biostratigraphic/aminostratigraphic analysis on Palaeolithic materials from the late 1990s onwards, together with the employment of new behavioural modelling techniques, has evidently been vital for refining chronologies, and thus broader understandings of the Lower and Middle Palaeolithic (eg, Wenban-Smith *et al.* 2000; White & Schreve 2000).

Interpretative themes

The question of how interpretative approaches employed in relation to prehistoric evidence have changed since 1980 is perhaps especially interesting given the widely held perception that British prehistorians tend to lead the way in archaeological theory (eg, Coles 1980, 2). This section considers, by decade, broad interpretative themes which have been particularly influential in British prehistoric research, as well as the tempo at which such themes have become evident in *PPS* articles following their initial discussion in archaeology more widely.

1980 & 1985

Overall, a wide mix of interpretative approaches is included in *PPS* during the 1980s. While the vast majority of researchers at this time were employing what can be characterised broadly as 'processual' approaches, some were still clearly influenced by earlier interpretative traditions (including culture-history). Meanwhile other researchers were beginning to use ideas from the newly emerging 'structural-Marxist' and 'postprocessual' paradigms. Consequently an impression is generated that this era in British prehistoric research was particularly varied and dynamic interpretatively.

The ongoing influence of culture-historical approaches is evident in several articles. The latter include discussions which focus in detail upon the identification of prehistoric artefacts, and how they can be situated in relation to broad typological sequences such as Clarke's Beaker classification system, and the Wilberton/Wallington scheme for later Bronze Age metalwork (eg, Needham 1980; Robertson-Mackay 1980). The interpretations ultimately arising from these articles also tend to be conjectural rather than being

justified by hypothesis testing or reference to ethnographic analogy. For instance, an excavation report about an early Bronze Age barrow considers its relationship to local tribal centres (assuming that these existed), and proposes that the cattle 'head and hooves' associated with the central inhumation represents a chief's cloak (assuming that chiefs existed) (Robertson-Mackay 1980).

The use of scientific or 'processual' approaches is widespread in *PPS* in the 1980s, particularly in fieldwork-related articles and artefact studies. One fieldwork report notes how the investigators intended to develop the most objective and empirical inferences possible (Mellars & Wilkinson 1980). Another notes how the investigators sought to 'test' certain interpretative hypotheses (eg, Needham 1980). One article uses the excavated evidence to estimate population sizes, discuss inter-site functional variability, and define social territories (Wainwright & Smith 1980). A study of Neolithic stone axes in Britain and Ireland uses the distribution of these artefacts as a basis for inferring social territories (Cummins 1980). Meanwhile an analysis of charred cereals from Iron Age settlements in Hampshire offers interpretations about harvesting and storage techniques (Monk & Fasham 1980).

The influence of emerging structural-Marxist and postprocessual ideas – particularly the notion that material patterning could be used as a basis for commenting on past social practices and ideologies (eg, Hodder 1982) – is traceable in only a few articles. One fieldwork report considers the potential for a site's inhabitants to produce economic surplus, and thus to gain access to exchange networks involving prestige items (Bradley *et al.* 1980). A study of pottery traditions in the early 1st millennium BC suggests that widespread changes evident across southern Britain at this time in practices of making, using and depositing pottery may relate to broader social shifts, such as the creation of new forms of communication and exchange (Barrett 1980). Additionally, an analysis of chambered tombs in Orkney argues that these structures could be understood as material vestiges of the concepts held in past people's minds and considers how certain symbols and items associated with chambered tombs might have been used to negotiate social relations (Sharples 1985).

Interestingly, despite the fact that a mix of in many ways incompatible approaches was used in *PPS* articles in the 1980s, there is no clear sense that there were significant disagreements between the advocates of different interpretative tropes. Rather it appears as if these different ways of understanding prehistoric material coexisted quite happily at this time.

1990 & 1995

Perhaps the most striking observation with respect to the interpretative approaches arising in *PPS* articles in the 1990s is that there is a dramatic difference in character between those presented in 1990 and those presented in 1995.

In 1990 *PPS* articles are surprisingly conservative interpretatively. In fieldwork-related articles, interpretations rarely extend beyond providing a basic site characterisation,

and considering issues such as economy and environmental context. Even where the discussion develops a little further, the interpretations raised were arguably limited in scope. One fieldwork report considers the kinds of societies represented by two Beaker burials – the care that the funerary party must have taken, and what kinds of intercommunity relations might have existed (Russel 1990). Another argues that an early Bronze Age round-house may have had a 'ritual purpose' (Benson *et al.* 1990). One notable and longstanding shift in interpretative practice is, however, evident in *PPS* in 1990. In this year, for the first time, two researchers justify the interpretations they make of past social and ritual practices using ethnographic analogies rather than empirical observations or hypothesis testing (Coles 1990; Whittle 1990).

By contrast, in 1995, a much wider spectrum of interpretative issues are raised, and a number of distinctive themes emerge. The use of ethnographic analogy to support interpretations is also commonplace by this time (eg, Barton *et al.* 1995; Brück 1995). Indeed there is an overarching sense of interpretative freedom in *PPS* articles in 1995, which was barely evident in preceding years. As a result, the impression is given that, following a period of relative interpretative stasis (and perhaps also uncertainty), British prehistorians had suddenly embraced a wealth of new ways of understanding their data. At the same time it is notable that at least some of the ideas raised for the first time in *PPS* articles in 1995 originally came to the fore some time previously. As was the case with methodological shifts (see above), it appears that significant delays – of up to 10–15 years – have sometimes occurred between when new interpretative ideas emerged initially, and when they are visible in the outcomes of prehistoric research.

The most obvious example of such a delay is in the employment of the notion of 'structured deposition' – the idea that depositional patterns can be used to comment on past ideologies or ritual practices. Variations of this concept feature strongly within several articles in 1995, although it was actually first discussed in archaeology in the early 1980s (eg, Grant 1984; Richards & Thomas 1984) if not earlier (Bradley 1975)⁸ (see Garrow 2012 for a detailed history of the development of this concept). A reassessment of Late Neolithic material from Woodhenge (Pollard 1995) proposes that depositional acts on this site were used as a means of defining certain categories of material, and of marking out specific areas of the monument, thus creating what might be understood as a symbolic microcosm of the Neolithic world. A re-analysis of a previously unpublished excavation at Buckskin, Basingstoke, identifies a potential fertility cult on the basis of unusual depositional acts (Allen *et al.* 1995). Meanwhile a study of human remains from later Bronze Age sites in southern Britain argues that ritual understandings may have been closely caught up in everyday disposal practices at this time, and that depositional acts involving human remains were a way of reproducing and renegotiating later Bronze Age social relations (Brück 1995). Even a discussion of Late Neolithic fieldwalking assemblages from two sites in the Yorkshire Wolds raises the potential that special flint objects may have been ritually destroyed and deposited (Durden 1995).

The use of interpretative ideas derived from social theorists and philosophers (eg, Bourdieu 1977; Giddens 1984), and from readings of anthropological literature more generally, is also widely apparent in *PPS* articles in 1995. Again many of these ideas were aired initially by archaeological theorists in the 1980s. Within synthetic articles, there are discussions of the extent to which certain materials were evidence for prehistoric peoples' understanding of an ancestral past (eg, Brück 1995), their negotiation and redefinition of individual and group identities, their expression of concepts of liminality (for instance the marking of boundaries), or their creation of metaphorical links (for example between humans and animals) (eg, Pollard 1995). Meanwhile in fieldwork-related articles, the topics raised include landscape perceptions, human/landscape relations, social aspects of occupation practices, the choices made in locating, marking, and moving between Mesolithic places (Barton *et al.* 1995), and attitudes to life, death, and the universe in the Early Bronze Age (Moore 1995).

In addition, one *PPS* article in 1995 reveals, for the first time (in the sampled volumes at least), the presence of a certain animosity between the advocates of different theoretical paradigms (Harding 1995). This article spurns the mainly 'postprocessual' ideas present within the vast majority of articles in *PPS* at this time, suggesting that they were far too insular. Rather, it calls for a return to the kinds of approaches (mainly 'processual' in origin) which operate at more extensive scales, consider longer time periods, and discuss notions such as social networks and processes, population size and density, site hierarchies, and the spatial organisation of political entities. Of course, the existence of this sort of disagreement is hardly surprising. However, what is perhaps unexpected is that such differences were not evident previously or more visibly in *PPS*, especially given that there is abundant evidence to suggest that new interpretative ideas emerging in the 1980s and early 1990s were actually very hotly debated (Hodder *et al.* 2007).

2000 & 2005

Following the flood of 'new' interpretative approaches that appeared in *PPS* in 1995, there are relatively few notable developments in this respect in articles from 2000 and 2005. Rather the themes of 'structured deposition' (Guttmann & Last 2000; Kirk & Williams 2000), 'landscape perceptions', 'power relations' (Needham 2000), 'social identity', 'metaphorical associations' (Kirk & Williams 2000), and the inter-relationship between 'ritual and everyday practice' (Guttmann & Last 2000) continue to be prevalent in articles from each of these years. Even in cases where new concepts are raised such as that of 'enchainment' – the idea that links between prehistoric people may have been forged, maintained, and renegotiated by deliberately breaking or fragmenting 'materials' and 'human remains' and re-using these fragments in depositional practices (Chapman 2000) – these are arguably developments of earlier concepts (in this case that of 'structured deposition') rather than being entirely novel. As was noted in relation to *PPS* articles in 1995, many interpretations during the period are supported

by reference to ethnographic analogies. Overall, however, it appears that the period from 1995–2005 was one of relative interpretative homogeneity, or at least one of consolidation in British prehistoric research.

Even so, a few fresh interpretative themes are raised in *PPS* in 2000 and 2005. A new interpretative optimism is apparent in Palaeolithic studies. This almost certainly relates to aforementioned methodological developments in the 1990s, principally advances in dating techniques. One article discusses how improved understandings of sea-level change during the period from 500,000 BP onwards, and thus of episodes during which Britain's islands were colonised and then isolated, would ultimately allow for discussions of issues such as the social and cultural aspects of the British lower Palaeolithic (White & Schreve 2000). Meanwhile the tantalisingly close dating of two lower Palaeolithic sites at Elveden and Barnham in Norfolk raised the possibility of discussing intra-site variability for the first time in this period (Ashton *et al.* 2005). It is also apparent that 'violence' (Schulting & Wysocki 2005) and 'social memory' (Loney & Hoan 2005) were topical themes for later prehistorians in the early 2000s.

Additionally at least two articles in 2005 question the widespread use of certain interpretative themes in prehistory over the preceding decade or so (eg, Schulting & Wysocki 2005; Garrow *et al.* 2005). This implies that some of the approaches initially developed by postprocessual theorists were being challenged by this time; not only by prehistorians yearning for a return to earlier kinds of analysis (see above), but also by those actually trying to engage critically with such ideas.

Balance of research and of researchers

The process of assessing shifts in the balance of research and the balance of researchers represented in *PPS* articles from 1980–2005 is interesting in two main respects: it provides a perspective on trends in the modes of research – fieldwork, synthetic studies, artefact analyses, etc – being undertaken in British prehistory, and also of how the social makeup of British prehistoric researchers has changed over this period.

With regards to shifts in the balance of research, it is clear that the proportion of fieldwork-related articles has declined since 1995. Instead, since 2000, *PPS* has included a higher proportion of works of synthesis and reanalyses of previously excavated material (Fig. 15). While this change is not dramatic, it is important to highlight that the massive increase in fieldwork investigations producing prehistoric evidence in Britain since 1990 (see above) has not led to a proportionate increase in the number of fieldwork-related articles in *PPS*. This trend almost certainly relates to a combination of factors relating both to the role of this particular journal and to the

changing publication-scene in archaeology more broadly. The traditional destination for the publication of findings from development-funded projects is substantial monographs rather than more concise journal articles. Meanwhile in recent years the possibility that both detailed excavation results and pithy summaries can be made available digitally has arguably made the publication of such accounts in international journals such as *PPS* less pertinent. Additionally, the number of artefact studies presented in *PPS* has fallen throughout the period under consideration. Indeed no such articles were included in the sampled *PPS* volumes from 1995 onwards. It is certainly possible that this change relates to the fact that artefact studies have become a less popular mode of research over this period. This trend may well also be linked, at least in part, to the difficulties involved in pursuing detailed artefact analysis within the financial strictures of developer-funded archaeology.

The main point to observe with regards to the balance of British prehistoric researchers contributing to *PPS* articles (in terms of their institutional backgrounds) is that this has changed very little over the period from 1980–2005 (Fig. 16). Other than in 1985, when the authors of *PPS* articles are derived from an unusually broad range of working contexts,

most authors throughout this period (at least 50%) have been based in universities. The majority of other authors have been attached to specialist fieldwork units (15–23%) or to (mostly national) museums (up to 17%). Alongside this broad consistency in terms of the makeup of authors, it is also noteworthy that overall, contributors to *PPS* in the 1980s came from a wider range of working contexts than those in the 2000s. In some cases, this is due to the fact that certain organisations ceased to exist or to function in the same way over this period (eg rescue committees, the RCHM, the CEU). Nevertheless, while researchers working independently or in association with local societies made up 11 of the 61 authors (18%) in 1980, 1985 and 1990, they constituted only two of the 69 authors (3%) in 1995, 2000, and 2005.

One interesting facet of this patterning is that, certainly towards the end of the period under analysis, the balance of prehistoric researchers contributing to *PPS* has not reflected the balance of researchers in British archaeology more broadly⁹. For instance, according to the best available estimates (Carter & Robertson 2002, 15–16), in 2002 archaeologists from universities, specialist fieldwork units, and national museums actually constituted 13%, 42%, and 3% respectively of all paid archaeologists in

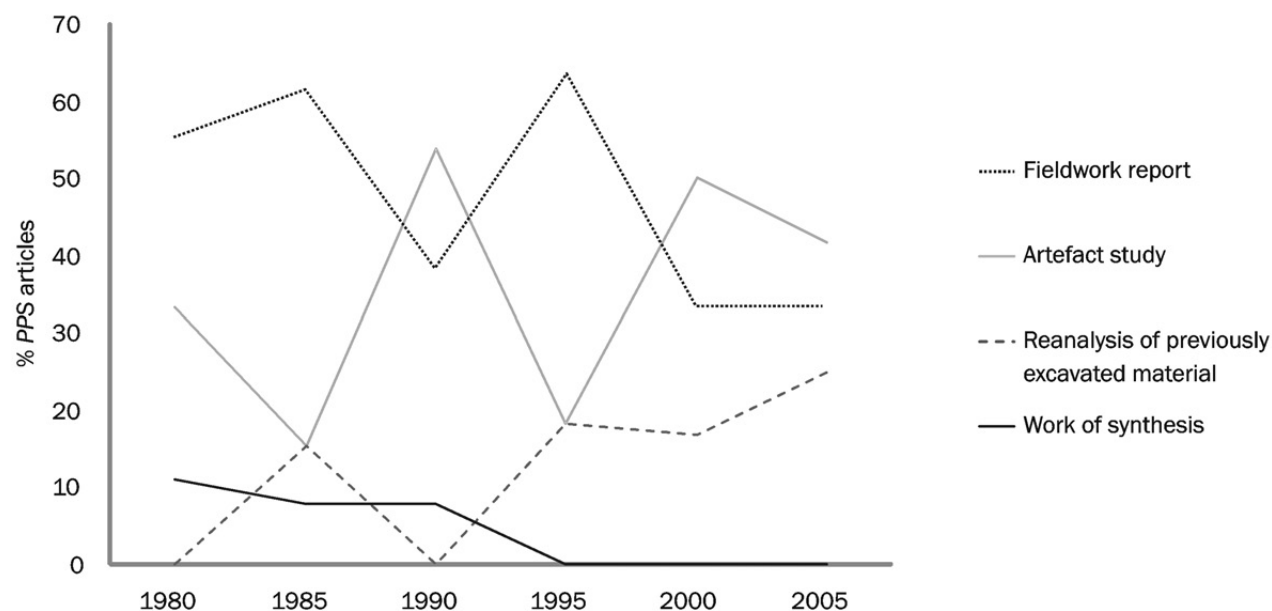


Fig. 15. Changes of the balance of research published in *PPS*, 1980–2005

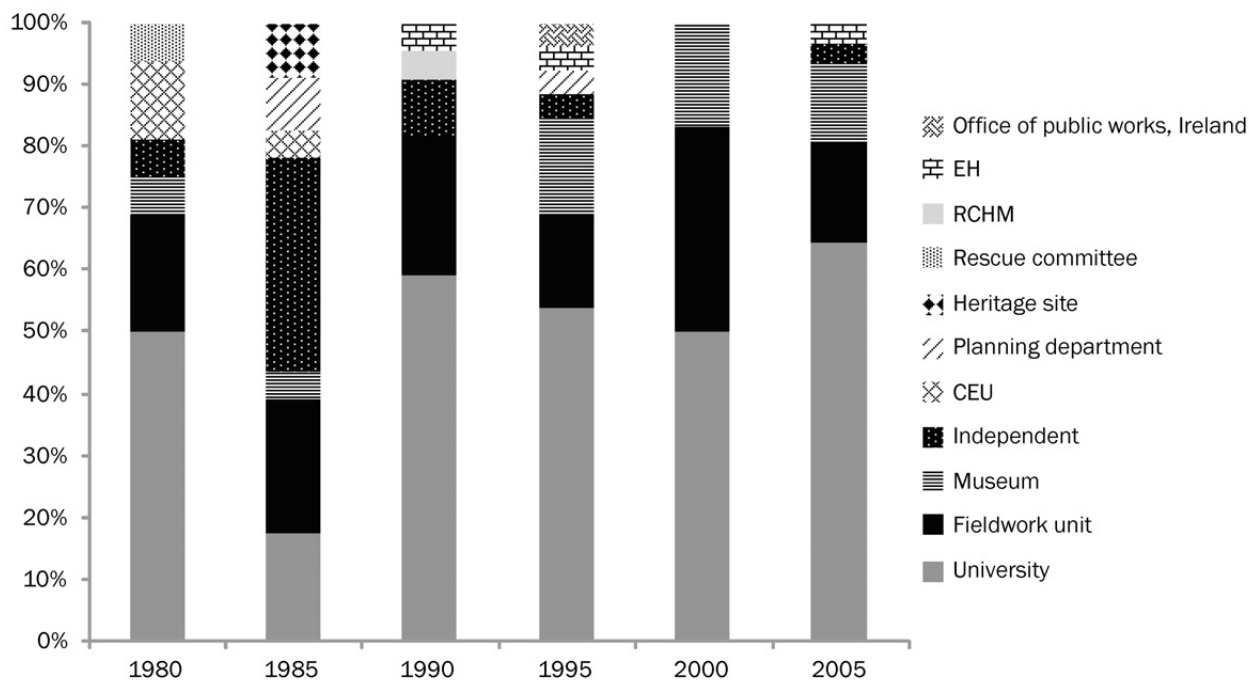


Fig. 16.

Shifts in the backgrounds (in terms of working contexts) of authors contributing to *PPS* 1980–2005

Britain. It is also estimated that by 2002 there were potentially more volunteer than paid archaeologists (*ibid.*, 20).

It is also worth pointing out that these two traits – the balance of research and that of researchers represented in *PPS* – are undoubtedly linked. It is certainly possible that, since researchers based in universities are the primary contributors to *PPS*, the fall in the proportion of fieldwork-related articles over the period from 1980–2005 is linked to the aforementioned shift in the working practices of university-based British prehistorians during this period away from major fieldwork-led research.

2010

Turning to articles in the most recent volume of *PPS* (Vol. 76), representing research at the beginning of the current decade, elements of continuity, change and the recycling of certain facets of British prehistoric research are evident.

With regards to the investigative process, the geographical distribution of projects represented in 2010 continues to be broad. However, it is worth noting that, as was the case in the 1990s, with one exception (Carter *et al.* 2010) the vast majority of investigations featured involve the targeted trenching and/or survey of previously known features for research purposes rather than landscape-scale excavation. There is also evidence that new methodologies are being employed in order to investigate prehistoric archaeology. One article raises the considerable investigative potential of Ground Penetrating Radar (Chapman *et al.* 2010). Another perhaps surprising feature of fieldwork-related articles in 2010 is the employment of archaeoastronomical surveys – a technique which is very old but is clearly still seen to be relevant – for investigating upstanding prehistoric features (Burrow 2010; Cook *et al.* 2010). More strikingly, in the realm of post-excavation analysis, in contrast to the situation in previous decades it is clear that an array of new techniques are

being used. This includes the use of lipid and thin-sectioning analysis on pottery, of isotope analysis on human bone, of radiocarbon-dating on cremated human remains, of Scanning Electron Microscopy to examine the surface of prehistoric iron and of new visualisation software to analyse survey data (eg, Carter *et al.* 2010; Chapman *et al.* 2010; Cook *et al.* 2010; Jones & Thomas 2010). Again, it is worth noting that, with the exception of the latter, most of these techniques have been available in archaeology for some time (eg, Aerts *et al.* 2001). Additionally and again perhaps surprisingly, a rise in the use of an older post-excavation interpretative technique – experimental archaeology – is apparent (Carter *et al.* 2010; Elliott & Milner 2010; Seager Thomas 2010).

By contrast, on the interpretative front, the broad themes raised in *PPS* articles in 2010 are little different to those discussed for the late 1990s and the 2000s. Continued critique of various 'post-modern' interpretations by those who are working with these ideas is also evident (eg, Beadsmoore *et al.* 2010; Seager Thomas 2010; Thomas & McFadyen 2010). Nevertheless two changes are noteworthy in this respect. First, none of the interpretations raised in 2010 is justified directly by reference to ethnographic analogy. It is certainly possible that this relates to the fact that key prehistoric studies which bolstered their findings in this way were heavily critiqued in the late 2000s (eg, Pope 2007; Webley 2007). Secondly, several of the interpretations drawn upon – for instance the notion that archaeological materials of various kinds may have been deliberately deposited or that certain prehistoric features or materials may have been attributed with metaphorical associations – appear either with no reference at all to where such ideas originated (eg, Cook *et al.* 2010, 183) or with reference only to more recent uses of such ideas (eg, Elliott & Milner 2010, 92). Consequently a sense is conveyed that certain interpretative tropes have been used so ubiquitously that they have become untethered from their original theoretical context.

Additionally, it is worth highlighting that, in contrast to the situation in preceding decades, a broadening of the spectrum of researchers who contribute to *PPS* is visible in 2010. As well as independent researchers and those based in universities, specialist fieldwork units and national bodies, there are contributors from an environmental consultancy and an independent research unit.

Summary

This detailed analysis of *PPS* articles between 1980–2010 provides insight into transformations in British prehistoric research at a broad level. Clear trends are evident in *PPS* articles in the ways that researchers have drawn upon a range of available interpretative approaches over the last 30 years. Smaller shifts were also observed in terms of the balance of research and of researchers represented in *PPS* articles. Additionally, this analysis provides an alternative perspective on the preceding examination of developments in prehistoric fieldwork in Britain over this period. The most important point to note in this respect is that the version of such changes provided by 'subjective' *PPS* articles diverges strikingly from that provided by 'objective' fieldwork records.

DISCUSSION

In reviewing the findings of this analysis, five main points are worthy of further consideration.

First, it is clear that, once fieldwork records are examined in detail, several broad claims which have been made about shifts in the prehistoric evidence base over the last 30 years (and which are corroborated by the version of events presented in *PPS* articles), particularly in terms of the geographical distribution and the scale of research, are difficult to uphold straightforwardly. The evidence for shifts in the geographic distribution of prehistoric fieldwork over the period 1980–2005 is somewhat ambiguous. Viewed at a broad level it is clear that the focus of prehistoric investigations has remained in development-rich areas (in southern and eastern England) throughout the period in question. Viewed at the level of English Heritage administrative regions, however, there have been more substantial shifts in the distribution of fieldwork between regions. Importantly, these findings add considerably to the widely held understanding (eg, Bradley 2007, xv; Darvill *et al.* 2002, 53) that the rise of developer-funded archaeology associated with the implementation of *PPG16* has been a prime factor in shifting the focus of fieldwork (both generally and in prehistory) away from traditional research areas such as Wessex. The advent of *PPG16* has almost certainly

provoked a shift in the overall distribution of prehistoric fieldwork. However the character of this change is arguably much more complex than has previously been acknowledged.

Evidence regarding changes in the scale of prehistoric excavations is simply not available for the whole of the period concerned. Perhaps surprisingly given the interest in this topic, the scale of investigations is not an attribute which has been recorded systematically. As a result, it is very difficult to assess the impact of transformations which have undoubtedly taken place in this respect. Nevertheless, it is worth suggesting on the basis of the evidence examined here, that it is certainly possible that truth resides both in previous contentions that the scale of prehistoric investigations has increased enormously in recent years (eg, Pollard 2008, 12), and that the latter part of the 20th century has witnessed a widespread movement away from large-scale excavation (Hunter & Ralston 2009, 11). Excavations on the scale of the recent projects at, for example, Heathrow Terminal 5 (Framework Archaeology 2006) and in advance of the construction of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link are clearly unprecedented in the history of British archaeology. Moreover they have undeniably changed our appreciation of landscape (pre)history as well as presenting researchers with new methodological challenges – how can sites of this scale be excavated in a way which is both expedient and which allows for the full interpretative potential of the data available to be realised? Yet such massive interventions are actually relatively rare. Due to the specific parameters of archaeology undertaken through the planning process (not least the facts that the bulk of planning applications relate to fairly small areas and that fieldwork undertaken in this context necessarily tends towards being expedient and cost-effective rather than expansive) the vast majority of investigations undertaken following the implementation of *PPG16* have been small in scale – watching briefs, evaluations, etc. Consequently the average area examined in projects producing prehistoric remains has probably either stayed the same over the period in question or even declined.

Secondly, it is evident that significant transformations have taken place with regards to the character of the prehistoric evidence base from 1980 to 2005. It is also likely that these changes relate closely to changes in fieldwork methodologies over this period. The rising predominance of open-area

excavation (rather than targeted excavation of previously known features) has increased the likelihood of producing certain types of evidence that are not easily identified from above the ground (less substantial settlement remains, etc). As the analysis of *PPS* articles over the period concerned, together with the evidence presented in recent synthetic works (Bradley 2007) shows, this shift has seemingly provided an opportunity for British prehistorians to investigate topics which would previously have been unattainable. One less well-discussed but equally vital finding of this analysis, however, is that the widespread employment of speculative techniques in British archaeology has almost certainly raised the probability that fragmentary prehistoric remains (parts of features, scraps of materials) which cannot be identified specifically are produced during investigations. One important consequence of this shift is that a mass of essentially unusable data about British prehistory is now being generated on a regular basis. As such, it is important to consider how, as British prehistorians, we should deal with this phenomenon. The potential certainly now exists that our comprehension of prehistoric material could increasingly become marred by the process of having to filter meaningful information from a mass of largely unusable data. This realisation should, perhaps, lead us to question more assertively (as some researchers have attempted to previously, eg, Chadwick 2000) British archaeology's heavy reliance on speculative fieldwork techniques.

Thirdly, while in 1980 prehistoric field investigations were carried out by archaeologists in many different (nationally and regionally-based) working contexts, only some of whom specialised in fieldwork, by 2005 prehistoric fieldwork was undertaken almost exclusively by archaeologists located within specialist fieldwork units. Perhaps the most significant consequence of this shift is that by 2005, the vast majority of primary data – both in British prehistory, and almost certainly in other periods as well – were produced by fieldwork specialists, rather than by archaeologists with wider working remits such as those based in local authorities, universities, museums and national bodies. Accordingly, by 2005, researchers in British prehistory who were not situated in fieldwork units were almost certainly much more dependent than they previously had been on data produced by archaeologists other than themselves. As Bradley has

noted (2006; 2007, xv), such a transformation in the distribution of primary data has major consequences for the flow of information between prehistorians in different working arenas, and thus for the understandings of prehistory that are ultimately produced. For instance one difficulty which has arisen in relation to this situation is that, because post-excavation analysis on major developer-funded fieldwork projects is often undertaken some time after the fieldwork has taken place (due to funding constraints which are very difficult to overcome and also because some fieldwork projects – for example in quarries – often simply go on for so long) frustratingly large delays can occur between when the data from these sites are initially created and when these data are made accessible to researchers beyond private fieldwork units. Conversely, where data from such projects have been made available relatively rapidly (eg, http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/t5_framework_2011/) the fieldworkers in specialist units who originally created these data are arguably denied the privilege they deserve of seeing through the full interpretative potential of their findings before researchers more broadly assimilate the results.

Considering further the analysis of key outcomes of British prehistoric research from 1980–2010, perhaps one of the most interesting aspects to emerge from this investigation is the highly variable, and yet also distinctive rhythm with which widely accepted shifts in research practices have been engaged with by British prehistorians. Focusing specifically on the interpretative approaches employed in *PPS* articles from 1980–2005 it appears that different archaeological concepts have been drawn on by prehistorians rather erratically. Aspects of certain theoretical paradigms (culture-history) clearly persisted for decades (at least into the late 1980s), while the mainstays of others schools of thought (processualism) were seemingly abandoned fairly abruptly in the 1990s, at least for a while. Some newer (postprocessual) ideas and ways of working were incorporated into research practices fairly quickly (for instance the notion that material culture analysis could be used to comment on prehistoric ritual and social practices). Meanwhile others – the notion of 'structured deposition', and the use of ethnographic analogy to justify interpretations – were in many ways dormant in prehistoric research for at least a decade before they were applied much more widely.

More broadly, however, this analysis has revealed a distinctive sense of the tempo also exists in terms of the rate at which new ideas and methods are raised and become assimilated widely in British prehistoric research practices. It was observed that there are often quite considerable time delays, of 10–15 years, between when marked shifts in practice (methodological or interpretative) initially occur, and when these changes become evident commonly in the outcomes of prehistoric research. This is the case even taking into consideration the inevitable time lags due to factors such as budgetary constraints and the immense amount of work involved in processing the results of major fieldwork projects. In relation to this point it is worth noting that the way in which knowledge flows (both spatially and temporally) from its initial context(s) of production to its assimilation and reworking by much wider groups of people has been a topic of considerable interest to historians and sociologists of science (see, for example, Gibbons 1994; Secord 2004). Becher (1989) suggested that for disciplines in which the potential topics of research are numerous and widespread (as is the case with archaeology) communication patterns between practitioners tends to be less well organised than in disciplines which have clear channels of investigation (for instance in the 'hard' sciences). Consequently, in the former, news about significant conceptual or methodological advances tends to trickle between researchers rather than spreading rapidly.

Finally it is important to discuss the shifting relationship, revealed by this analysis, between British prehistoric research at a broad level and *PPS* as a medium for communicating the outcomes of key research from 1980–2010. Divergences were noted to have emerged between the two, primarily in terms of *PPS*'s representation of fieldwork and also of the British prehistoric research community. The substantial impact of developer-funded archaeology in terms of revolutionising the database available for British prehistoric research has almost certainly thus far been underrepresented in *PPS*. Meanwhile although archaeologists based in specialist fieldwork units (and to a lesser extent independent archaeologists) are increasingly responsible for producing the vast majority of primary data on British prehistory, this has not resulted (with certain notable exceptions) in them also contributing more often to *PPS* articles.

Overall it can be argued that, despite its intended mission to include articles from a wide range of contributors, from 1980–2005 *PPS* increasingly primarily represented the key research of contributors from certain archaeological sectors (principally academia) rather than that of researchers in British prehistory more broadly. Undoubtedly the reasons associated with this apparent shift in the relationship between the perspective provided in *PPS* articles and research actually undertaken are complex and numerous. The emergence of the Prehistoric Society's newsletter *PAST*, as an alternative, less weighty (Champion & Gamble 1986), forum for presenting key findings from fieldwork projects is likely to be one important factor. Another is that (unlike in academia) internationally important research articles are not necessarily viewed as being the primary publication aim of investigations undertaken by specialist fieldwork units, with monographs still being dominant in this respect. Nevertheless it is important to consider such issues since according to the representation of British prehistoric research found within *PPS* (and presumably also other key forums), it is easy to see how concerns are perpetuated about, for instance, the research credentials of developer-funded fieldwork (eg, Baker 2002). If the latter rarely appears in contexts which foreground 'exemplary' research, it could straightforwardly (although often wrongly, eg, Bradley 2006, 11) be assumed that independent researchers and those in specialist fieldwork units carry out exemplary research less often. The observed broadening in the makeup of researchers represented in *PPS* in 2010 may have resulted from the general ebb and flow of researchers contributing to this journal. However it could alternatively mark an editorial attempt to address such issues.

In conclusion, substantial changes have clearly taken place in the evidence base for prehistoric research, the methodologies which are used to investigate this evidence, the ideas which are drawn upon in order to interpret it, the makeup of the British prehistoric research community, and also in the position of *PPS* within this broader milieu. It is hoped that this article builds productively on the legacy of Wainwright's 'The pressure of the past' in highlighting the importance of continuing to scrutinise both the nature of such shifts, and also their implications for British prehistoric researchers.

Endnotes

- ¹ A forthcoming AIP publication will, however, seek to build a more nuanced account of how shifts in the character of archaeological interventions have affected knowledge production practices (Ehren Milner pers. comm.).
- ² Much of the research presented in this paper was undertaken in 2006 as part of my doctoral research. At the outset of the process of updating it for publication here, it became clear that the necessary AIP data for 2008–2010 was not yet available. As a result of these two factors, the decision was made to end the main part of this historical overview of fieldwork in 2005 (the last appropriate year of the five-yearly sample).
- ³ More comprehensive data for prehistoric investigations in England during the 1980s reside within the Royal Commission on Historic Monuments Excavation Index (RCHMEI). For a summary of this source see <http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/newsletter/5blurbs/excav.html>. Unfortunately however, this data is extremely difficult to extract in a form which is suitable for the purposes of this analysis (for instance the database cannot be searched by the year of investigation). Consequently, while it might become possible in future (S. Jeffries & M. Barratt pers. comm.), at the time of writing this data could not be included in the research.
- ⁴ It is worth noting that it is difficult to define 'excavation' as a methodology, particularly since trial trenching and watching briefs can also involve excavation. Throughout this analysis 'excavation' is taken to mean open-area excavation, the excavation of trenches specifically in order to investigate a known archaeological feature (eg, a round barrow), or where substantial excavations were undertaken alongside a watching brief.
- ⁵ See Cooper 2010 for a detailed account of how periods and forms of evidence have been defined and measured for analytical purposes. Although for much of northern and western Britain the Roman Iron Age is arguably still 'prehistoric', it was not possible to include data of this period in the analysis. With regards to site types it is important to note that archaeological features were recorded as described in the original sources, unless the feature in question is not included in the National Monuments Record (NMR) monument thesaurus (English Heritage 2008). In such cases, the feature is listed using the relevant NMR monument type (for instance 'log boat' is listed as 'watercraft'). Individual feature types are then grouped into broader classes for analysis. This grouping follows broadly the NMR monument classes, except where it was deemed important to distinguish between certain aspects of these classes for analytical reasons. The monument classes used in this analysis were thus defined as follows:

Monument class	Feature types
Agriculture & Subsistence Domestic 1	Field system, lynchet, cairn, linear earthwork Settlement, enclosed settlement, round-house, pallisaded enclosure, building, hut circle, hut platform, post-built structure, broch, midden, shell midden, burnt mound. Pit, storage pit, post-hole, gully, boundary, water-hole, enclosure, in cases where these were clearly associated with more substantial settlement features
Domestic 2	Occupation site, rock shelter. Includes pit, pit clusters, waterhole, tree-throw in cases where they produced settlement-related material but were not associated with other settlement features or described explicitly as being settlements (eg, a Neolithic pit site which produced pottery, flint, etc)
Defence	Defended enclosure, hillfort, <i>oppidum</i> , hilltop enclosure, gatehouse, rampart, promontory fort
Religious, Ritual & Funerary cremation	Cremation (where not clearly associated with a monument), cemetery, animal burial, ritual pit (eg, hoard), urned cremation, inhumation (isolated, eg, not clearly associated with a monument)
Religious, Ritual & Funerary (Monument)	Round barrow, ring-ditch, henge, causewayed enclosure, cursus, stone circle, cist burial, cist grave cemetery, chambered long cairn, timber platform, oval barrow, stone avenue, pit alignment, temple
Artefact Scatter Other	Artefact scatter, flint scatter 'Industrial' 'Maritime' & 'Transport' sites (eg, industrial site, metalworking site, watercraft (log boat), trackway, drove road)
Unassigned	Earthwork, boundary, cave deposit, raised shoreline, ditch, marine bed, findspot, post alignment, palaeoenvironmental remains, palaeochannel, buried land surface. Includes enclosure, pit, gully in cases where they are not associated with other settlement features

⁶ It is actually very difficult to determine the exact number of projects undertaken by 'specialist fieldwork teams' using the available data. Some projects (65%) were ascribed explicitly to a regional or national fieldwork unit, whether independent or linked to a wider organisation. However it is certainly possible that some of the projects attributed more broadly to

county councils, museums, and universities were also undertaken by specialist fieldwork teams embedded within these institutions.

⁷ This is not just a consequence of a 10–15 year delay occurring between fieldwork and publication. In fact, with four exceptions (where delays of between 11 and 31 years took place between the completion of fieldwork and its publication in *PPS*) the average delay between fieldwork and publication throughout the period from 1980–2005 was 4–5 years (based on data from 27 fieldwork reports from the *PPS* volumes analysed in detail).

⁸ Although this mode of practice was not explicitly described using the term 'structured deposition' at this point.

⁹ The data required to verify whether *PPS* articles have become more or less representative of a cross-section specifically of the British prehistoric research community throughout the period in question is not available.

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