



Broken flint arrowheads from the Drayton cursus excavations.

# Ceremonies and funerals: Abingdon's important prehistoric monuments



Map of Drayton 'cursus' and other monuments (in red).

There are many monuments dating to the Neolithic period (about 4,000 BC to 2,500 BC) and the Bronze Age (about 2,500 BC to 800 BC) round Abingdon. People were buried in some of them, and ceremonies of various kinds almost certainly took place at all of these monuments.

AAAHS has helped excavate two of the most important: the Drayton 'cursus' and the barrow cemetery at Barrow Hills, between Abingdon and Radley.

## The Drayton 'cursus'

A 'cursus' is a type of Neolithic monument, consisting of a pair of parallel ditches, running across country for a long distance. No-one knows exactly what they were for, but they may have been for ceremonies which included processions.

The southern end of the Drayton cursus was discovered by aerial photography in the 1930s. In the 1980s, AAAHS and Oxford Archaeology excavated the northern part. This showed that the cursus was at least 1.5km long, running from higher ground near Drayton onto the Thames flood plain. Building it must have required a lot of labour.

## Barrow Hills, Radley Road – Bronze Age burial places

This site is on the outskirts of Abingdon. It was excavated in 1983 - 1985, before houses were built off Audlett Drive. The work was done by Oxford Archaeology, with help from AAAHS and others.

Remains of many periods were found, including a Roman cemetery and a Saxon village. Some of the most important features excavated were 'ring-ditches'. These are the sites of Bronze Age barrows (burial mounds). The excavated ring-ditches were part of a cemetery, consisting of two rows of barrows extending over several hundred metres towards Radley.

A number of barrows were excavated. Some had central grave-pits containing burials with pots, flint implements and some bone and metal items. Some objects from this site are included in this exhibition.



Excavating one of the ditches of the Drayton cursus in a gravel pit at Sutton Wick. The monument ran from higher ground near Drayton down onto the Thames floodplain.



Bronze Age barrows in Somerset. Unlike the Barrow Hills ones, these still survive as mounds today. The mounds were made by piling up soil from the surrounding ditches – at Barrow Hills, these 'ring-ditches' were excavated. (Photo - Sharon Loxton/Ashen Hill Barrows/CC-BY-SA 2.0)



Aerial photograph of Bronze Age ring-ditches at Barrow Hills being excavated, 1983 to 1985.



Ring-ditch at Barrow Hills after excavation. Here, soil from the ditches has been piled up to create a bank, and a central mound, to give an idea of what the barrow might have looked like originally.



The skeleton of a man, buried with a pot (to the left of the head) and other items (at the feet). From the central grave inside a small ring-ditch at Barrow Hills.



Google Earth aerial photograph showing location of Barrow Hills excavations.