



*Above: Grooved Ware from a multi-university dig testing geophysical anomalies at Durrington Walls in 2016*

might have come from the hollow is the curiously shaped stone 16 – at the back of the circle beside the solstice axis.

These sarsens could have been part of a pre-Stonehenge focus that included the North Circle and other as yet

*Left: Excavation by the SRP in 2008 in Stonehenge Bottom and (below) on Stonehenge Down*



unrecognised features, some of which were there by at least 3100BC. There were large monuments further afield. I mentioned two causewayed enclosures, but not two cursus earthworks, one – the Stonehenge Cursus, nearly 3km of paired parallel banks and ditches with no obvious purpose just north of Stonehenge – of exceptional size. The latter has recently been dated to 3630–3370BC. Some 70 years ago fragments of Stonehenge bluestone were first found near the Cursus, and the possibility still remains that an early monument (another Bluestonehenge?) once stood there. The region had acquired a wider significance centuries before the first dated earthwork at Stonehenge.

Continuing radiocarbon dating may reveal further clusters of middle neolithic ritual features (the Riverside Project found early neolithic pits close to the Cuckoo Stone). But for now the combination of a little henge, large cattle bones (which sometimes featured in older, early neolithic long barrows) and, perhaps, the two largest natural sarsens on the plain aligned with the rising midsummer and setting midwinter sun, make the site locally unique. It all suggests that Stonehenge didn't so much burst into view shortly after 3000BC, as grow slowly over a long time before.

**Fire on the plain**

Nonetheless, there is something else which truly distinguishes the site's earlier history. About half of the area inside the earthwork circle at Stonehenge has been excavated. Within that space there is a ring of cremation burials – collections of ash

*Left: Recovering cremated remains at Stonehenge, SRP 2008*