

# BUTSER ANCIENT FARM

## A Unique Research & Educational Establishment

*Dr. Peter J. Reynolds*

*In The Constructed Past: Experimental archaeology, education and the public.*  
Edited Peter G. Stone & Phillippe G. Planel.  
Routledge 1999

Paper given at World Archaeological Congress, Delhi, India. 1994

### **Development History**

Butser Ancient Farm was set up in 1972 specifically as a programme for research and education. Its remit to study the agricultural and domestic economy of the period c.400BC to 400AD. has remained largely unaltered. The period embraces the late Iron Age and early Roman period. The overall objective was and is to create practical working research programmes based directly upon the archaeological evidence as interpreted from excavations.

During the last twenty years the Ancient Farm has occupied three locations. The first site on Little Butser, from which the farm draws its name, was a northerly spur of Butser Hill in Hampshire. The base geology of the site was middle chalk overlaid with a shallow friable rendzina soil just 100mm deep. Given its geology and aspect it offered a worst option scenario for the proposed research programme but in its defence it once supported a Bronze Age/Iron Age farmstead the occupants of which cultivated the valley to the north and east. The primary advantage of a worst option lies in the immediate acceptability of the data in the sense that the results of the experiments, especially those which depend upon a combination of soil and climate, have not been enhanced by pre-selecting optimum conditions. This site was in continuous operation from 1972-1989.

In 1976 a second site was developed in the valley bottom on Hillhampton Down on the southern slopes of Butser Hill. This shared the same geology but with a deeper (300mm) soil cover of friable rendzina, clay with flints and chalk granules. It was operated as a research site in conjunction with Little Butser but its primary purpose was as an open-air museum open to the public and available as an educational resource for schoolchildren. Given the independence of the Ancient Farm from any statutory funding either national or local it was necessary to develop a sustaining source of income

On both these sites the infrastructure comprised research fields and stock areas, animal paddocks, and an enclosure within which were built constructs based upon specific archaeological data. The livestock maintained at the farm comprised five breeds of sheep (Moufflon, Soay, Manx Loghton, Hebridean and Shetland), Old English Goats, Dexter cattle and Old English Game Fowl. Occasionally Tamworth/European Wild Boar cross pigs were also kept. The differing natures of both sites allowed direct comparisons to be drawn between the different bioclimatic zones. The major advantage of this second development was a redefinition of the binary purpose of the Ancient Farm as being both a research and an educational establishment. The planning phase for the development of the second site rather explains its primary purpose - it was called the Butser Ancient Farm Demonstration Area (BAFDA) and by most was regarded as a separate entity from

the first site on Little Butser. It was here that the methodology and the results would be shown to a visiting paying public and a full educational service could be offered to schools. Thus the first site could be relieved of any visitor pressure except by academic groups, a pressure that had gradually increased once buildings had appeared there. It was interesting to observe that in the year 1973 - 1975 on Sundays in August when Open Days were organised for the public, regularly over a thousand people trekked down the hill to the site to see the research at first hand.

Inevitably, given the fact that the site of Little Butser was given over to the Ancient Farm at a minimal rent by Hampshire County Council, there was a hidden agenda. Subsequently the County Council in association with the Forestry Commission created one of the first Country Parks in England. A visitor centre with interpretation facilities, café and car park was built in 1975 and scheduled to be opened in June 1976. BAFDA was located just three hundred metres away from the visitor centre. In effect, given the uniqueness of the Ancient Farm, it was intended as a major attraction within the Country Park itself. Considerable pressure was exerted by Council Officers to reach "a state of completion" of BAFDA by June 1976 when both the Country Park and BAFDA were visited by H M Queen Elizabeth. In a sense it was the urgency to achieve "a state of completion" which marked the fundamental difference in perception between the writer and the organising committee on the one hand and the County Council staff on the other of what the Ancient Farm was actually intended to achieve. It seemed quite beyond the latter officials that an open-air laboratory where experiments were in process which examined not only creation but also degradation through time, could never achieve "a state of completion"! Even the natural changing of colour of a thatched roof from a golden yellow to weathered brown caused a heated discussion with suggestions of neglect.

However, it is only just to record that the writer also had a hidden agenda. This was simply to examine the possibility of creating not a demonstration for public and educational reasons but rather to create a second parallel open-air laboratory in a different bioclimatic zone where research was the primary aim and the research data would, in effect, be doubled. The real challenge lay in the design of this second site to allow for visitor flow with distinct interest focuses. In its mature state four such distinct focuses were created, one at each end of the site: respectively the zone for clay and metallurgy and an experimental Roman structure ostensibly a grain drier which ultimately proved to be a remarkably efficient malting floor - a hypothesis incidentally raised by a member of the visitor public who happened to be a professional brewer. The central enclosure was the obvious main focus surrounded by an experimental ditch and bank and containing a great roundhouse with ancillary buildings. The fourth focus point was a splendid terraced herb garden where herbs from prehistory and the Roman period were grown.

The second, and indeed ongoing, challenge is to persuade people that they are actually visiting an open-air laboratory and not a reconstructed Iron Age Village. The ribald and regular remark that "they didn't have one of those in the Iron Age" provides a wonderful opportunity to explain exactly what is going on. Again in the writer's experience this has led to greater visitor satisfaction especially when they realise the potential of making their own positive observations. The elegant paradox of a laptop computer within the construct of a large prehistoric roundhouse, a modern weather station nestling within the plots of Emmer wheat, a video-camera recording the firing of a Romano-British kiln, all serve to jerk the visitor into the reality of the purpose of the Ancient Farm

However, it was this reality of purpose which finally drove an ever-deepening rift between the Ancient Farm and County Council staff. The perception of a Disneyland populated by hairy Celts bringing in major revenue was never far from their dreams. On a number of occasions local

management, deeply challenged by limited education and less ability, demanded to know who might be interested in "all this scientific stuff". A perfectly sensible question which deserved and received an equally sensible answer which was sadly beyond the questioners comprehension. Human knowledge consisted simply in increasing visitor numbers to the park!

Inevitably relationships worsened through time not least because of the writer's insistence in maintaining the integrity of the Ancient Farm. Ironically the farm was visited by two elected members of Hampshire County Council who were convinced that they owned the farm and paid for its staff. Their disabusement of this belief was both amusing and deeply disturbing. The amusement lay in their reaction to what could be achieved on minimal financial resources. The concern rather focused upon the nature of information or disinformation which was relayed by Council permanent staff to the elected members of the Council. Having been intimately involved with both aspects of County government it is quite clear that the elected body are rarely troubled by all the facts. Sadly politics were always thus.

Ultimately the rift became finalised in 1990 when the Ancient Farm was requested to leave the land areas it had occupied since 1972 and 1976. Subsequently BAFDA has been turned into a successful picnic and barbecue area. One should perhaps be grateful that the time was sufficiently long to allow the long-term patterns to have reached statistical validity. Perhaps, too, it was time to relocate to a third bioclimatic zone. As a learning experience the knowledge gained includes a clear recommendation that any intention to run a long term experimental site on publicly owned land should be subject to legally binding conditions which cannot be whimsically altered by the politically motivated. A single illustration of this point is the occasion when the Recreation Officer sought to have the writer replaced by someone more amenable to reason. His failure to achieve this halcyon state, one suspects, actually sounded the end of any sensible relationship between the Ancient Farm and the County Council.

At the beginning of 1991 both these sites were vacated and a new site developed at Bascomb Copse near Chalton. The underlying geology is upper chalk with a loamy soil averaging 350mm deep. This new location offers the typical option of the chalk downlands of Southern Britain as exploited in all periods of the past. This site has the same resources developed but with the added bonus of potential further development. Indeed, the research now extends into the Roman period with the building of a construct of a cottage Roman villa including a major research programme into the problems of a working hypocaust. The site also combines the twin focuses of research and education in one location. As with the previous sites the objective is to carry out a 1:1 scale empirical trials to elucidate the archaeological data.

## **Methodology**

From the inception of the Ancient Farm in 1972 it was realised that for this approach, full-scale empiricism, a basic methodology was critical. Without a strict system which applied to all aspects of the work, the results would be incompatible and not allow any form of ultimate integration. It had been envisaged even in the early seventies that given a large enough data base rigorously acquired over a long enough period computer simulation could be employed to extend the data to embrace far greater regions than those to which the research was manifestly restricted and to respond to questions not originally formed at the beginning of the programme.

The resultant methodology is essentially cyclical in form. The archaeological data, the evidence recovered by excavation along with whatever documentary sources are available and reliable form the base or prime data upon which the archaeologist/ prehistorian mounts an hypothesis. The testing is in the form of a physical experiment which by definition requires replication. The conduct of the experiment must be consistent from start to finish. An experiment which is changed or modified during its course immediately invalidates the original question and the experiment itself. Given adequate replication, usually a minimum of five replicates, the data from the experiment can be compared to the original data upon which the hypothesis was raised. If there is agreement between the sets of data, the hypothesis can be tentatively accepted as valid but with the caveat that several different hypotheses raised on the same data can also be validated, a condition referred to as the 'multiplicity of hypothesis validation'. If there is no agreement the hypothesis is not merely invalidated but actually proved to be wrong. The value of this methodology lies especially in the seemingly worst case situation. By building an experiment the prime data is subjected to extremely close scrutiny in order to execute the experiment, a process which emphasises aspects previously unconsidered or even unrecognised. Even after the committal of an experiment, it can be readily seen that there are fundamental errors which are further focused upon during the course of the experiment. The resultant negative correlation allows greater insight into the original data and the ability to construct a second or even a third experiment leading to a validated but different hypothesis.

## **Nature of Experiment**

Necessarily experiments vary in nature in direct response to the type of hypothesis. Broadly experiments fall into five categories, not that these categories should be seen as mutually exclusive, rather they are a convenient set of explanations. The first and perhaps most obvious category is that of structure, the creation of constructs based upon patterns of post-holes and stakeholes. The word reconstruction is to be eschewed since for prehistoric buildings where virtually nothing material survives it is totally inaccurate. The vast majority of buildings evidenced from pre-history and proto history survive only in the form of negative evidence, the position where posts and stakes once stood. Consequently the term "construct" has been chosen to underline the deductive process and avoid semantic confusion. Reconstruction is properly applied to the putting together and restoration of buildings of which adequate remains survive. The second category of experiment involves process and function where trials are mounted to examine the effects of usage on archaeological features like pits or objects like ploughs or alternatively the effect upon tools in the execution of their hypothesised purpose. Within this category one must place technological resources like pottery kilns and furnaces in the sense that experiment can determine the limits of their performance as well as their efficiency. The third category of experiment is devoted to simulation trials. In this kind of experiment one seeks to discover how an archaeological feature reached its ultimate state as recovered by excavation. Perhaps the best example is the experimental earthwork or ditch and bank. Excavation discovers buried ditches which reveal deposition layers within them brought about by natural erosion processes. The layers are normally irregular and asymmetrically deposited. In order to gain an understanding of both the irregularity and asymmetry the only course of action likely to yield a valuable result is to construct a 'new' version which can be studied against climate and time. The Ancient Farm is currently conducting a major research programme of simulation trials involving octagonal earthworks on different rock and soil types.

The fourth category of trial, described as probability trials, is in a real sense the logical extension of the first three categories. In such a trial one seeks to establish within closely defined parameters probable outcomes or results. Inevitably such results have to be viewed as probability statements very much defined by the constants built into the experimental procedure. The best example of a probability trial is the growing of prehistoric type cereals in order to establish potential yield factors of these cereals within the probable technology available within a specific time period. Within such trials the variables of weather and soil type can be regarded as semi-constants provided they are recorded in detail. More significant in terms of probability are the presumed constants of treatments, sowing rates and management. Deductive hypotheses and their testing also fall within this category of experiment. The use of this type of trial relies upon data supported validated hypotheses which could not be unless a prior unsubstantiated process or activity had taken place. For example in Britain there is no evidence of threshing or threshing locations yet cereals had to be threshed before they could be processed into food or prepared for storage. In effect it is a function which had to have taken place for without it there would be nothing - *sine qua nihil*.

The fifth and final category of experiment is best described as technological innovation. Within this category fall the initial application of machines or trials which seek to improve or enhance archaeological practice. Particularly is this the case with prospection machines like fluxgate gradiometers and soil magnetic susceptibility meters, ground radar and even X-rays borrowed from other disciplines. The examination and testing of these devices to assess their potential value are, in fact, experiments. Similarly monitored field trials can be used to facilitate the understanding of recovered archaeological data. For example, a long series of trials have been conducted by the writer to determine artefact movement within the modern and the prehistoric plough zone in order to assess the value of the soil as an archaeological layer deserving the same detailed analysis as those layers arguable undisturbed by subsequent activity.

Naturally all these five categories should not be regarded as being mutually exclusive. Often an individual experiment can embrace several categories simultaneously and logically a probability trial is entirely dependent upon the three previous types of experiment. In reality separating the experimental process into these categories is only for the convenience of explanation rather than any purpose of definition.

All these categories of experiment have been pioneered and extensively practised at the Ancient Farm. The one important factor which has been deliberately excluded from the nature of experiment is the human. As far as possible the experiments are scientific trials with variables being measured against constants with emphasis being placed on replication and predictability of subsequent trials. Data whenever possible is expressed numerically. No importance has been attached to 'time taken to achieve' since the variable of human motivation and skill are impossible to evaluate or calculate. Similarly 'living in the past' forms no part of the scientific work of the Ancient Farm. Such activities are signally instructive to the participants and may or not be character forming. There is undoubted value and profit to gain from some forms of re-enactment in the field of education and interpretation, but there is little of scientific worth likely to extend our knowledge. In a very real way the mental impedimenta which unavoidably burdens modern man precludes any real understanding of his historic counterparts let alone his prehistoric ancestors. If only I could have been paid for every time I have been asked how it feels to be an "Ancient Farmer" or a "Prehistoric Celt" I would be a rich man. It is a sense of regret that media reporters whether newspaper, radio or television are inflexibly and inexorably driven to ask standard questions whether one had recently had an accident or even won the lottery. Do we deserve the media we have or do they deserve us the unwilling consumers?

The objective from the beginning of the Ancient Farm has been to work within the constraints of the above methodology concentrating upon the problematic archaeological or prime data. Each of the three sites has been managed in such a way as to seek to integrate all the different experiments so that not only can the individual experiments be studied *per se* but also foreseen relationships between the experiments can be evaluated and unforeseen relationships might be identified.

## **Core research programmes**

### ***Cereals***

The primary focus of the research has been upon the agricultural economy of the later Iron Age. From 1972 growing trials have been carried out with the typical cereals of the period, Emmer (*Triticum dicoccum*) and Spelt (*Triticum spelta*) on a range of soil types in different bioclimatic zones. Other cereals have been incorporated into the trials including Club Wheat (*Tr.aestis-compactum*), Old Bread Wheat (*Tr.aestivum*), Einkorn (*Tr.monococcum*), and Barley (*Hordeum vulgare*). For treatment variabilities the legumes Celtic bean (*Vicia faba minor*), Peas (*Pisum sativum*), and Vetch (*Vicia sativa*) have also been cultivated. Field aspect, soil type, manuring and non-manuring, crop rotation and fallow rotation are all incorporated as variable treatments. An important element of these cropping trials has been the study of arable weeds, in terms of their presence and absence and their value as irritants or benefits.

Cultivation experiments utilising different types of cattle drawn ard have been conducted examining both the efficiency of the ard as a tool on the one hand, on the other the effects of its use on the ard itself. Associated observations within the cultivation programme include the monitoring of lynchet formation on field boundaries and dishing within field areas. Trials with the magnetic susceptibility meter across manured and non-manured zones within field areas along with lipid analysis of treated soils suggest a positive method of determining manuring activity. The cropping trials have also afforded opportunities to carry out pollen rain catchment along with the development of a new pollen rain trap.

### ***Grain Storage***

The second aspect to the cropping programme has been an intensive programme of grain storage in underground silos. A large range of variables has been examined over a period of twenty years yielding significant results. Grain can be stored very successfully in simple pits in chalk, limestone and sand rocks both short and long term. After short-term storage of about six months the grain has germinability in excess of 90%. Germinability, though not necessarily edibility, deteriorates the longer the storage period. Critically a pit has an indeterminate life span. No sign of souring was observed during 15 years of trials. The implications of these storage experiments demand a re-evaluation of their currently accepted economy and use.

### ***Constructs***

A parallel research focus has been upon the houses and structures of the late Iron Age. A large number of different round-houses have been built on each of the three sites, each house being a specific construct based upon the best available excavated data. It has always been a particular

aim to project and test a structure within the constraints of the archaeological evidence. A generalised or composite structure has never been built at the Ancient Farm. Two significant constructs have yielded the greatest reward to date. The Pimperne house construction allowed a real distinction to be drawn between constructional and structural evidence and on its dismantlement in 1990 it was found that a building of 13m (42ft) diameter could adequately exist beyond the life of its structural post-holes, implying that dating evidence found within the post pipe did not necessarily indicate a time after its destruction. An even larger construct based upon an excavation at Longbridge Deverel Cowdown, Wiltshire, 15.4m (50 ft) in diameter built in 1992-93 has demonstrated that a free span of some 13m is relatively simple to achieve.

### ***Earthworks***

Since the early 1980s a major research programme into experimental earthworks has been carried out. This has involved the construction of simple V section ditches 20m long, 1.50m deep and 1.50m across with dump banks with built in variables of berms and no berms, turf retaining walls and turf cores based on an octagonal plan. The plan is dictated by different weather patterns experienced from the major points of the compass. The research design entails the study of erosion and revegetation through time against recorded climate. The programme at present has four major earthworks on upper, middle and lower chalk and aeolian drift. The proto-experimental earthwork built at the Hillhampton Down site in 1976 and excavation in 1981 shared startling rapidity of vegetable colonisation and stabilisation as well as a totally unexpected skew of the deposition layers.

In addition to these core research programmes, subsidiary programmes have researched into metallurgy and kiln technology. Further programmes are run in conjunction with other institutions both here and abroad. Several of these have involved the testing of prospection devices and their research applications with special reference to magnetic susceptibility.

### **Education**

Given the nature of the Ancient Farm as an open air laboratory with the core research programme providing physical results in the form of domestic buildings and working structures, earthworks and fences creating enclosures and trackways, plantstock and livestock contributing vitality and seasonal change and demanding functional and processual attention, the end product presents not only an integrated research milieu but also a unique teaching tool. This reality, seasonal change, creation, deterioration and renewal was foreseen at the inception of the programme as a critically important research and educational aspect. Because experimentation uses as its primary data the archaeological evidence and thereafter is completely constrained by the individual sciences required by each experiment, the range of disciplines involved is extremely wide. For example, a building construct involves architectural and engineering skills while in contrast the storage of foodstuffs involves a working knowledge of mycology. This wide spectrum of sciences simply represents the underlying working of any social organisation through time whether implicit or explicit. Naturally to this scientific basis can be added the arts of communication through word and image. Thus the integrated research programmes which are the Ancient Farm encompass all the aspects (literacy, numeracy and communication) of any and all educational curricula. Dependant upon the method of presentation all age levels from primary pupil to post graduate researcher are readily accommodated.

## *Schools*

In recent time education has become more regularised with the introduction of national curricula which prescribe knowledge and skill attainment targets by age stages. Commonly such targets cannot be achieved solely within the classroom and educational philosophy requires more integration with the world beyond the confines of school buildings not only to elucidate the raw subject material by real application but also to enhance the understanding of society and social organisation present and past as it affects the individual.

The Ancient Farm has striven and contrives to strive to respond to the changing demands of education. The obvious 'point and tell' experience supported by questionnaire and/or worksheet, the crocodile of clipboards, has to a large extent been rejected as an educational method. For example, given the resources of great and small prehistoric house constructs the emphasis is placed upon experiential education. The essence of volume and space, materials and function allow not only the direct physical experience but also the dialectic method of sourcing human activity and material requirements to be explored. This is further enhanced by physical participation in process and function, the real 'hands-on' experience which leads to unstressed but indelible knowledge. In terms of the very young, it is the educational experience which opens the door for future exploitation. It is the sensory perception which creates the foundation of knowledge. That this knowledge is gained through personal involvement in group activity garnished with the inevitable humour of such involvement only serves to strengthen that knowledge.

For older children the implications of 'hands-on' experience leads to understanding of the integration of system, lines of supply and demand, sequences of work and ultimately human impact upon environment. It is, perhaps, the infinite cross-curricular nature of the Ancient Farm which initiates and substantiates an appreciation of the complexity the real world. It is possible to range from the simplest of activities like spinning and weaving to the complexities of the climatic impact on plant growth, from the base techniques of applying daub to a wickerwork wall to the mathematical determination of the forces exerted by a cone upon a cylinder. This diversity of academic disciplines accessible by choice against complexity and ability provides on the one hand a rich and flexible educational tool, on the other a continuously increasing data resource.

A typical school visit entails considerable preparatory work from the moment of first contact. The teacher is always invited to come to the farm prior to the actual school visit in order to see the resources being offered. Failing this a school visit is offered when a member of staff can introduce the farm on their territory! Always there is a full discussion of what the teacher wants to achieve by the visit and how the schoolchildren's learning experience will fit into the requirements of the National Curriculum. Given the multi-disciplinary nature of the Ancient Farm it is possible to cover a wide range of National Curriculum requirements from the obvious historical perception of the Celtic and Roman worlds through subjects embracing geography, environment, building, meteorology, physics, agriculture, mathematics, communication skills, drama, art - the list is virtually without end. Teachers are further invited to suggest other areas of the curriculum which the Ancient Farm might serve.

With regard to the usual historical motive for a school visit, the children are normally given an introductory explanation inside the great roundhouse, a classroom never before experienced. Emphasis is always placed upon "how do we find out" and "what the evidence is". After the introduction each child participates in two or three hands-on activities like building a fence, daubing a wall, making a pot from raw clay, spinning with a drop spindle, weaving on an upright loom and grinding wheat into flour with a rotary quern; the Roman period activities



extend into making tiles, handling mosaics, using Roman equipment like the *groma* and the *aqua libra*, measuring with Roman dimensions of the *uncia* (inch) and the *pes* (foot). Often a visit is concluded by a short "story-telling" session around the hearth in the great roundhouse. Occasionally, if requested, a special demonstration of a "dangerous technology" is made for the schoolchildren. The most spectacular of these is the pouring of molten bronze into an open mould. For a child to see this is an experience which has enormous implications from the simply dramatic to the scientific appreciation of the nature of materials. Teachers are always encouraged to continue with follow-up work and we offer ongoing services from the Ancient Farm, which include visits by Farm staff to schools to give specific talks.

In order to operate this education service schools are required to pay a small fee per child, the proceeds from which are used to employ an Education Officer whose job is to control, administer and enhance the service. To facilitate the education service specific publications are prepared at the Ancient Farm in the form of information sheets dedicated to specific aspects of the programme. These are in the form which a teacher can either use as a source or photocopy for each child. Similarly there are educational zones around the Ancient Farm itself, which are dedicated to a specific activity. The decision to spread rather than concentrate these zones is quite deliberate so that children are moved about the Farm and not secreted away. Out of term time the facilities are extremely popular with younger visitors.

### *Universities*

For students and postgraduates since the Ancient Farm has been conducting long term research programmes since 1972, there is available a data base both capable of sustaining repeated examination and open to previously unasked questions arising from modern excavation techniques. In addition it is available as an open-air laboratory where new experiments both short and long term can be carried out in a scientifically protected environment. It has always been a fundamental philosophy that the research of the Ancient Farm should be open to inspection and prime data available for reworking. Especially is this the case with the advent of computer technology.

### **The Public**

From the beginning there has been surprisingly little conflict between the constraints of scientific empirical research and the utilisation of that research as an educational resource. Nor has there been any major difficulty in allowing public access to the Ancient Farm. In essence this has been a critical financial resource along with the offered educational services to the survival of the Ancient Farm.

The initial proposition that the Ancient Farm is, in fact, an open air research laboratory has been strictly maintained from its inception to the present day. The visiting public witness research programmes in progress. The paradox of modern technology in the form of computers and scientific measuring instruments in association with ostensible prehistoric material serves only to enhance the laboratory aspect and underlines the fact that empirical research is an important method of finding out about the remote past and that the latest technology has a significant role to play in that research. The "theatre" of the Ancient Farm is, however, occasionally used for special events. The festival of Beltain, welcoming the spring, is one such event when a huge wicker man stuffed with straw is "ritually" fired before an audience but always with appropriate explanation to

defuse any ideas of neo-paganism or Druidic cults. Similarly the great roundhouse is occasionally used as a theatre - concerts of Celtic music and poetry are particularly successful. The sound of the Celtic harp within the house is especially haunting and emotive.

Following this approach, it has been the experience of the writer that the public at large are generally very happy to accept the underlying reason for the Ancient Farm - there has always been some exceptions who expect to find total re-enactment and are initially disappointed in not finding a tribe of hairy Celts in evidence, but the majority of these can be 'converted' with a little explanation. Further, since the overt study is of a complex prehistoric society at work, in the sense that the research deals with the full range of skills from farming to house building, from metallurgy to cooking, the modern visiting public are well capable of providing further insights from their own knowledge, skill and experience. It was a visiting brewer who, in the late 1970s, challenged the Romano-British corn drying oven suggesting that it was far better as a malting floor. Further research proved his hypothesis to be far more probable! Thus it is a mark of respect for the public at large that the research element is stressed, the explanation that hypotheses are being explored to assess validity is not obfuscated by spurious re-enactment. The emotional journey into the past is an illusion sustained by a suspension of judgement and alloyed by prejudice.

## **Conclusion**

The Ancient Farm is not at all influenced or driven by specific educational requirements. It has its own research agenda specifically designed to explore the primary archaeological data by direct empiricism. However, this agenda is infinitely exploitable as a teaching resource. Because it is actively involved in research programmes which have a beginning, a middle and an end over whatever time period is required, it is always in a state of change. It is signally not a museum nor is it a school. Rather it is a resource where hypothesis can be explored and where a negative answer is viewed as valuable as a positive answer. It is itself, therefore, a place of learning and by direct implication a place of teaching. In this sense it is a unique enterprise.

© Peter J. Reynolds 1995.  
M.A., Ph.D., F.S.A., F.R.G.S., M.I.F.A.  
Director Butser Ancient Farm.  
Nexus House,  
Gravel Hill,  
Horndean,  
Hampshire.  
England.  
PO8 0QE