Post-medieval and modern sarsen stone industries in prehistoric landscapes.

Sarsen stone is a celebrated building material of internationally-important prehistoric monuments not only in Wiltshire, but across its southern British distribution. Yet the most intensive use of sarsen stone was after AD1500, and especially from cAD1800 when new tools and skills transformed this geological resource into a versatile product, equally appropriate as finely dressed ashlar for new churches as robust street furniture.

This later industry has been treated as a local quarrying trade with little study beyond brief accounts written by family members, and one oft-quoted paper (King 1968). These are the origin of a long-standing narrative of a successful trade developed from small yet enterprising beginnings. Explored in more depth, with a view to understanding the industry’s implications for evidence of prehistoric sarsen extraction, a different, more contingent, story is emerging. Presented here as a work-in-progress, this paper challenges the conventional politico-materialist account of modern sarsen quarrying.

Katy Whitaker
k.a.whitaker@pgr.reading.ac.uk | @artefactual_KW | 07769 712799