



**BEACONS OF THE PAST:  
LAUNCH EVENT DESBOROUGH CASTLE 15 SEPTEMBER 2018**

1. Today is a celebration of launch of a project that had its infancy early in 2013. The inspiration behind it came from Shirley Judges one of the CCB Board members. Shirley was a wonderful person who had been captivated by a course she had attended at the Department for Continuing Education at the University of Oxford called Re-thinking Hillforts.
2. The course was run by Prof Gary Lock and Shirley was buzzing about it because The Chilterns has a lot of hillforts. Moreover, Gary Lock had recently set up a 4-year project, 'The Atlas of Hillforts in Britain and Ireland'. We knew that very little work had been done on our hillforts. Only two had been studied (Ravensburgh and Ivinghoe) and we counted up 19. Here was a huge opportunity to be at the centre of evidence-based research and ensure that the Chiltern hillforts could be properly represented in the Atlas.
3. Our first thought was to go and visit Dr Ian Brown in Oxford who had been working on Ravensburgh. By a happy coincidence he happened to have all the artefacts from the dig in his office and we were able to hold an almost intact hold iron age bowl and admire many beautiful objects and quite a lot of very old bones.
4. We invited Ian and Gary on a field trip to visit Pulpit Hill and they were fascinated. In the mean-time local archaeologist Dr Jill Eyers, was taking groups of people to different Hillforts to do the surveys for the Atlas of Hillforts Project and it was clear that there was a lot of interest.
5. Shirley and I then produced the Terms of Reference for a Chilterns Hillforts Study to present at the next Conservation Board Meeting. Our Aim was to achieve increasing understanding and awareness of Chiltern Hillforts and to ensure that they got recognition of their National importance. To our great joy the National curriculum had just included the Iron Age in the new Key Stage 2 curriculum, so we now had children to engage with and inspire.
6. Our objectives were lofty and ambitious, and we wanted to include ALL of the Chiltern Hillforts, whether or not they were in the AONB. We wanted to:  
Discover more about each one of them, improve their condition and management and most of all, improve understanding and enjoyment of this treasure that was in our midst. An important element that we were keen to use was LIDAR technology which can reveal the underlying landscape even if it is covered in trees.
7. We presented our proposal to the Board on the 24 June 2013 and got agreement to set up a Working Group, which we duly did.



8. By November we had organised our first Conference called 'Understanding Hillforts' with eminent speakers including Archaeologists along with conservation volunteers to give over 80 delegates a flavour of the task we were undertaking.

9. Its success gave us the confidence to start on our HLF bid. But very sadly and much too quickly Shirley became unwell and very tragically died in June 2014. In our sadness the determination to finish what Shirley had started was strengthened. After a lot of hard work from the Board staff, great commitment from so many partners and tremendous support from our HLF case officers we have succeeded.

10. Today is a celebration of the effort and sheer endurance to get to the top of this hill and say wow - we have done it! What is more we have ended up with a Project that is bigger than we dreamt of, the number of Hillforts to be included has grown and the LIDAR is at a higher resolution and over a bigger area than we ever thought possible.

11. Best of all it is going to be led by not one, but two full time archaeologists, who complete the circle because they come from the same cradle at the University of Oxford where all the excitement began. And I tell you as I hand over to Dr Wendy Morrison that those of us who have been in it from the beginning are just thrilled to bits.