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Re-examining the contribution of Dr Robert Toope to knowledge in later seventeenth-century Britain: was he more than just 'Dr Took'?

Jonathan R. Trigg

> Had made dead skulls for coin the chymist's share,
> The female corpse the surgeos purchas'd ware…[1]

This chapter presents a reflection on, and assessment of, the life, career and work of the little-studied seventeenth-century physician and 'Renaissance man' Robert Toope. He is currently, perhaps, chiefly known for his correspondence on wide-ranging, eclectic, subjects with the likes of fellow antiquarian John Aubrey,[2] in addition to Robert Boyle. He also fell victim to later less-than-complimentary references by William Stukeley, who observed in a denigratory fashion that the people local to Avebury referred to Toope as 'Dr Took' (see below). Aubrey, meanwhile, was known to have spent time transcribing the spider-like, looped handwriting of Toope as part of his *Templa Druidum* (e.g. Burl, 2002: 41–2; 2010: 80).

The evidence suggests that Stukeley's, albeit famous, oft-quoted observations were bafflingly ill-considered. Toope was more than merely a product of his time. He seems to have been clearly someone who was subject to periods of intense activity that had great influence on the work of his contemporaries, as well as those antiquaries and academics that followed, and without which we would have far lesser understanding of the archaeological record of the Wessex region. Yet, unlike many fellow antiquarians, for example, he did not publish his own observations, favouring the communication of such to other contemporary scholars.

There are, it seems to me, three forms of network to which Toope's work contributes, and these might be referred to as his contemporaries and near-contemporaries (seventeenth and eighteenth centuries), after

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which there seems to be hiatus in the archaeological usage of Toope's work up until the second quarter of the nineteenth century and for the ensuing century. Thereafter, he is next and most recently utilised by post-war academics who realise the value of using such observations to inform archaeological work.

As such, we are reliant, therefore, on the material produced by his network of contemporaries and the interpretations of later antiquaries and scholars to understand the importance of such an individual. The nature of the information provided by Toope comes in the form of reporting what would now be considered archaeological material to the members of his social circle who, like Aubrey, clearly had an archaeological bent. There is also evidence of the fact that Toope was truly a Renaissance man, as can be seen by his further interactions with medical men of the time, such as Robert Boyle, but also in his observations relating to the waters of Bath. As much antiquarian material was self-published, and thus done with a particular viewpoint in mind, it seems that a study of this form is of importance in understanding the activities of this period – one indeed which has seen very little work of any sort, and in which the views of established scholars are perhaps overvalued. Not least in the region in which Toope operated (south-west England), much is made of the contribution of many well known individuals, such as those mentioned above, and the contributions of the lesser known actors are less appreciated.

In this chapter, therefore, I consider such issues, highlighting the paramount importance of going back to the original sources in work of an archaeological and similar nature. It also serves to establish such facts as are known about Toope, correct some misinterpretations and introduce some new information in what is more than merely a nuanced biographical essay. In order to do this, a combination of published sources, some less well known than others, and unpublished documentary sources, including hand-written texts, are utilised in order to build up as full a picture as possible. The recovery of these forms of evidence contributes to the understanding of networks of exchange of knowledge as they relate to prehistoric England.

The production of such biographies can produce either hagiographies or character assassinations – in order to assess the work of Toope, here it is hoped that a balanced account may more properly be given. Why was it that Toope did what he did, how and what were and are the implications of his activity? And, as a result, how does such an understanding tell us about both the archaeology of an area and the history of the way it has been interpreted? What was Toope's contribution to knowledge, and what is his ongoing cultural significance? Such questions are more complex than previously considered, I would

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suggest. This chapter contends that, whilst Toope's techniques were neither scientific nor appropriate (in the modern sense), he has proved vital, indeed seminal, in the recording, interpretation and understanding of archaeology that might otherwise have been missed, unrecorded or unknown. His observations have influenced the subject from the very first time they were set down. In his communications to others within his network, Toope brought to the attention of past and present scholars the very material that he was simultaneously destroying in his particular search for 'ancient remains', and in so doing Toope strongly influenced past and present ideas about archaeology. This is a significant case study for the examination of the paradox in the way that antiquarian views of the past still have an influence on our developing present views.

The earlier and personal life of Robert Toope

Little is known about the personal life of Dr Toope; next to nothing of it has been set down in published form. Thus, for reasons of putting his life into some form of context, here I would like to set down what I have elucidated from a variety of sources. From his will, the only contemporaneous official document which can be confidently associated with the good doctor (National Archives, Ref PRO Prob 11/417), a number of familial relationships can be identified. These may be summarised thus: he was married twice. His first wife was unnamed in the will, but from that marriage there were three daughters, Frances, Anne and Katherine.[3] His second wife was named Grace, and from this union there were two (unnamed) daughters. He is likely to have died in 1693, probate having been granted on 7 July that year. His place of burial seems to have been lost to the ravages of time.

A detailed search of the available records relating to births, marriages and deaths (www.familysearch.org) would seem to indicate that, at the period in question, there were Toope families in Dorset and Wiltshire (East Knoyle and Stourton). For geographical reasons, the Wiltshire branches would likely be more appropriate. Furthermore, assuming that the two Wiltshire Toope branches are part of the same family, there would seem to be a chronological shift from East Knoyle (where documentary evidence exists exclusively for the period 1613 to 28 May 1629) to Stourton (where the same forms of evidence can be found from 26 May 1639 to 22 September 1686 exclusively – see also Bardsley, 1996 [1901]: 758). Significantly (in relation to the preceding paragraph), the name Katherine features as a family name, being the wife of one generation of Robert Toope and the daughter (christened 15 March 1684, baptized 22 March 1686) of the later. From these records, there is the possibility, then, that Dr Robert Toope was born to Robert

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and Katherine Toope, and baptised on 19 January 1650 (Ellis, ed., 1887: 11).

In later life, and certainly in the period during which he was archaeologically active (at least 1678 to 1685 and down to his death), the unpublished and published record would suggest that Toope was rather a peripatetic individual. It is certain from his will (National Archives, PRO Prob 11/417) that he was recorded as being 'of the city of Bath', but there were many other locations in which he seems to have had periods of residence, and in which he was likely to have made contacts, both people with whom he gained contact and from whom he gained information,[4] and areas on which he was able to report.

On 16 July 1683 Toope acquired Acton Court (the manor house of Iron Acton, Gloucestershire), together with the associated former park, demesne, manorial rights and two fairs:

> Indenture 16 July 1683. Assignment from Mr Oldfield and Mr Atwells to Mr Ridley and Mr Coules in trust for Dr Toope of the House, Park and Demesne of lron Acton. All that Capitall Messuage or Mancion house and scite of the Mannor of Iron Acton with all the Outhouses Courts Yards backsides gardens and Orchards thereto belonging And also the Conygree or Conywarren thereto near adjoyning and all ways waters and casements thereto apperteyning All which said premisses arc scituated together in Iron Acton on the same side of the waye whereon the said Capital Messuage is standing And also all that Parke or ground in Iron Acton to the said Capital Messuage near adjoyning and inclosed with a stone wall and paled commonly called Acton Parke and formerly used as a Parke containing One hundred fifty three acres together with the wood or grove of timber within the same park and all those closes formerly parcell of the said parke one part thereof is now called the Rayles and containe thirty acres the other commonly called the New Grounds and containe twenty eight acres and also all those seven Closes commonly c.alled Brookmeadows and Horsecroft lying near together and adjoyning Acton Parke which arc parceJI of the Demesne lands of the said Mannor and all those two Closes one whereof Iyes on the North side of the parke and containeth five acres and the other lyeth on the Eastward side of the said parke and containeth two acres parcell of a Tenement formerly in the tenure of Edward Short and all those Messuages scituate in Iron Acton Acton llgar Frampton Cotterell and Lattcridge now or late in the severall tenures of Edward Short Samuel Hellier William Walter Thomas Hobbes and Alice Legg widow and all those two fairs holden yearly (and all profits and perquisits of the manor) (WRO 947E/137b)

There were also twelve acres of woodland called Chowle Grove at Frampton Cotterell (WRO 947/1098). Toope did not stay there long,

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however, selling the property after less than a year, in June 1684, to the barrister, William Gray of Gray's Inn (Manco, 2004: 32).

Furthermore, we can be sure from a letter that he wrote to John Aubrey dated 1 December 1685, that he was at that point domiciled in Bristol (Fowles, ed., 1980: 52–5; also Colt-Hoare, 1821: 63–4; Burl, 2000: 315; Pollard and Reynolds, 2002: 109; Burl, 2010: 73). An anonymous source (anon, 1819: 329–30) places Toope in the Kennet Valley neighbourhood, while Kains-Jackson (1880: 54) suggests that he was resident in Oxford, but by far the most repeated residence for Toope is suggested as being Marlborough. The origin of this suggestion, or at least the first reference to it that I can find, seems to be the article on Avebury by William Long (1858a: 327). This is based on the letter from *Monumenta Britannica* referred to above but noted as being from Bristol. The reasons for associating Toope with Marlborough (or Oxford for that matter)[5] are unclear but they have often been repeated (Davis and Thurnham, 1865; Boyd Dawkins, 1871: 242; Smith, 1884: 169, 172; Cunnington, 1933: 169; Grinsell, 1936: 151; Piggott, 1958: 236, 1962: 4; Cleal and Montague, 2001: 14; Pollard and Reynolds, 2002: 233; Semple, 2003: 79–80; Perks, 2011; Cunnington, n.d.: 12–13), though they may be explained by the contents of his letter to Robert Boyle written from Bath in 1683 (see below, and Birch, ed., 1772: 658) which indicates that he was certainly living in Marlborough by February 1678.

Bath seems to have become his permanent domicile after having stayed there temporarily; he stated in a letter to Aubrey that 'I lodge at ye One Bell in ye Strand and shall tarry 2 or 3 days in Town and your company will be acceptable too' (Fowles, ed., 1980: 55); this accommodation would no doubt have suited Toope for his travels, being on the main coach route to London and elsewhere. Aubrey Burl (2010: 80) states that he certainly had a medical practice there, and this chapter can confirm that evidence, as well as adding some evidence of his character and household, or at least of his having the stature to attest to the presence of servants, and that he was well thought of by fellow medical practitioners.[6] Whilst it is unclear how Toope and Aubrey became acquainted, it does seem that the latter had an interest in the 'healing powers' of the springs of Bath (Burl, 2010: 104), and this might have been the catalyst for the formulation of this aspect of his knowledge networks. Aubrey certainly communicated with the doctors there (Britton, 1845:16–17), and there is no doubt that Toope might be recorded amongst that number (see Guidott, 1708) and is likely to have recommended the cure to the doctors in the area (see also Guidott, 1708: 16–17).

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Toope at the Sanctuary (Overton Hill, Wiltshire)

Perhaps the most significant contribution made by Toope to the formulation of archaeological knowledge is the record he made of the presence of an ancient cemetery in Wiltshire. We know that Toope was at the Sanctuary, Wiltshire (a double-ring stone circle of the Neolithic/early Bronze Age period) in 1678, when he witnessed the discovery of human bones at the site – 'Dr Toope found these bones Ao Dom 1678' (Aubrey in Fowles, ed., 1980: 52–5) informs us of this, from his letter of 1685 showing that he was there again in that year.[7] We are told that at this later point he was living in Marlborough (Long, 1858a: 327, and repeated in Boyd-Dawkins, 1871: 242; Cunnington, 1933: 169; Piggott, 1962: 4) or at Bath (Burl (2000: 315), although see above for a criticism of this view. From this, we learn that, in between Kennet and Overton Hill, on land belonging to 'one Captayne Walter Grubbe' (quoted in Cunnington, 1933: 169), Toope observed, not far from the road, workmen digging enclosure boundaries for French grass (not searching for stones as suggested by Anon, 1819: 329–30) who informed him that many bones had been exposed, although of what form, the workmen knew not. Toope investigated the bones and found them to be human (Fergusson, 1872: 76). This identification can be considered accurate, given Toope's medical qualifications (Fergusson, 1872: 77; Kains-Jackson, 1880: 54).

The next day Toope returned and made his own excavations to recover 'many bushels' of bones in order to make medicines from them which were used to treat the ailments of his patients (see also Long, 1858a: 327; Davis and Thurnam, 1865; Boyd-Dawkins, 1871: 242–3; Smith, 1884: 169; Cunnington, 1933: 169; Grinsell, 1936: 150; Malone, 1990: 26; Burl, 2000: 311; Burl, 2002: 41–2, 61; Burl, 2010: 80).[8] The use of human remains in medicinal treatments was not uncommon at this time (Sugg, 2008; 2011; 2013). Grinsell (1976: 16) uses Toope's activities here and at West Kennet (see below) to extend the expectation of efficacy to all prehistoric tombs, and why not? Toope probably adapted the process used to produce Dr Goddard's Drops – a multipurpose liquid preparation – although given the age of the bones he was dealing with, quite what remained that was of use must be questioned (Cooper, 2004). It seems to me that, as Toope was dealing with bones of some age, he was bucking the trend of the time – where antique material was used, it seems that ancient Egyptian was considered superior. Perhaps he was following the view that older material was superior, or maybe there was less discomfort from the anonymity afforded by unnamed remains. Toope certainly seems to be the sole general practitioner *recorded* as plundering British archaeological material. Whilst

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there was considerable use of skulls from the Middle Ages onwards, everyone else seems to have been using more recent burials. Followers of the Swiss physician Paracelsus (1493/4–1541) seem to have favoured those that had been buried for not much longer than a year (Richard Sugg, personal communication, 06/02/12).

Toope recorded the condition of the bones – large but 'almost rotten, but ye teeth extreme & wonderfully white hard and sound (no tobacco taken in those days)' (Fowles, ed., 1980: 52–3; Cunnington, n.d.: 12–13; Burl, 2000: 311). He also recorded that they were about 80 yards (*c.* 73 metres – Cleal and Montague, 2001: 14) from 'a larger spherical foundation whose diameter is 40 yards by wch you know ye circuit within this larger Temple there is another orb whose sphere is 15 yards in diameter' (see also Colt-Hoare, 1821: 75, where the letter seems first to have been published; Higgins, 2007 [1829]: xxvi).[9] The land surrounding this monument, Toope records, was level (also Camden, 1722: 208), and underneath were found the burials.[10] He writes that the burials were so close to one another that each skull touched the next. Importantly, he records that he exposed two or three but just to see the nature of the burials, determining that the feet lay towards the prehistoric monument (Smith, 1884: 172)[11] and that they lay less than a foot (30 cm) below the surface. He also noted that radiating out from this group of burials was a further group, at similar propinquity to the former. His view was that the whole site was full of burials (also Colt-Hoare, 1821: 63–4), thus suggesting that the burials covered an extensive area. A later (undated) note to Aubrey states that the name of the field the workmen were enclosing was Millfield (Burl, 2000: 311) in the parish of Avebury (also Colt-Hoare, 1821: 62).

It seems likely that Toope went back to the Sanctuary burial ground to gain further bones to supply more treatments, for there is a note in Aubrey's papers relating to the letter that contains the above information. This states that the first discovery, as we know, was in 1678 and that Dr Toope 'was lately at the Golgotha [i.e. the Sanctuary burial ground] again to supply a defect of medicine that he hath from thence' (Colt-Hoare, 1821: 64; Davis and Thurnam, 1865). In a note appended to the 1685 letter from Toope to Aubrey, the latter states that 'he was lately at ye Golgotha again', meaning that he was there around that year (also Boyd-Dawkins, 1871: 243; Malone, 1990: 27).

William Stukeley (1743: 33) makes reference to this event, but in the opinion of the author, Toope's observations should be taken with a pinch of salt. Stukeley states that the human bones were found in 'digging a little ditch by the temple'. There is, it seems to me, nothing in the original account of the excavations, either by the workmen or by Toope, that suggests the ditch was little. Further, Stukeley states

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that the 'little ditch was across some small barrows and where there were no barrows' (Stukeley, 1743: 33). Again, Toope's account makes no reference to barrows or any form of earthwork. Indeed, Toope's account is very clear that the site in question was flat. The Sanctuary is, indeed, in near proximity to a vast monumental complex but, as has been shown, and will be shown below, Toope seems to have considered, and shows, himself to be an empirical scientist given the strictures of his time. I would suggest that it is unlikely, although not impossible, that he would have failed to mention barrows, given he stresses the levelness of the plain in his account. Cunnington (1933: 169) informs us that there existed, east of The Ridgeway and to the south of the London road, slight embanked earthworks which may have represented the remains of the enclosures to which the construction of Toope refers. Regrettably, the present landscape means that any such features have probably since been obliterated.

Finally, Stukeley claims that 'Mr Aubrey says sharp and formed flints were found amongst them, arguments of great antiquity' (Stukeley, 1743: 33). Stukeley does not mention what Aubrey source he is dealing with (presumably the at-that-point-unpublished *Monumenta Britannica* – Bodleian MSS. Top gen. c. 24–5), but Aubrey makes no reference to flints, or indeed any other finds, at this site. There is nothing to suggest that Toope was interested in removing anything more than bones from a site, and it is clear that Aubrey states a lack of desire to excavate; regarding Avebury he is absolutely certain in stating 'His Majesty [Charles II] commanded me to dig at the stones [Avebury]… to try if I could find human bones: but I did not do it' (Fowles, ed., 1980: 34). Such a statement defying the monarch would not seem that of a habitual excavator of sites.

Toope's account of the burials at the Sanctuary is the only evidence we have for them; later archaeological work has proved unable to locate any remnants of the site. His 'many bushels' is often considered to be in large part reason for this, although it should also be noted that, after the stones were removed by a Farmer Green in 1724, the ground was later ploughed by a Farmer Griffin (Anon, 1914: 125). As a result, the account is significant, yet it is perhaps indicative of the nature of prehistoric enquiry in Britain in the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Toope's observations were frequently referred to in a descriptive manner (e.g. Stukeley, 1743; Camden, 1722; Anon, 1819; Colt-Hoare, 1821; Long, 1858a, 1858b; Thurnam, 1860; Davis and Thurnam, 1865; Boyd-Dawkins, 1871; Smith, 1884; Cunnington, n.d.). When the 66th Annual Meeting of the Cambrian Archaeological Association (Monday 11 to Saturday 16 August 1913, in association with the 60th meeting of the Wiltshire Archaeological Society) convened

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in Wiltshire, the Avebury environs were the subject of the first excursion, on Tuesday 12th August 1913. At Avebury, the Rev. E.H. Goddard (in the role of tour guide) referred to Toope's activity at the Sanctuary (Anon, 1914: 125). It even made it into the popular travelogue *Roads to the North* (Brooks, 1928: 140–1), although here (and not for the only time, it seems) Toope's observations at the Sanctuary are equated with Avebury.[12] There were, however, few attempts to *interpret* what Toope had observed.

The first such attempt was that of poet Charles Kains-Jackson (1880: 54).[13] In the absence of excavations at the nearby site of Avebury, he used Toope's discoveries to argue that both monuments were burial monuments (also Fowles and Brukoff, 1980: 19; Pollard and Reynolds, 2002: 109). Burl (2010: 111) argues that the human remains Toope exploited were Neolithic commoners, with the upper echelons of society being buried within the stones themselves. It is unlikely, however, that the burials are of Neolithic or Bronze Age in date; the form of burial simply does not fit with known practices of those times. Later, in his attempt to argue for a continuity of burial in circular enclosures from the Neolithic down to the morphology of churchyard enclosures, Hadrian Allcroft (1920: 281–2) cites Toope's account of the burials to argue that the site was on consecrated ground and that the only reasonable explanation for the vast number of burials was that they were specifically brought there for that purpose. Furthermore, he calculated that, allowing for an entrance/avenue, and assuming that the burials encircled the entire site, the burials would be located in a circular area with a diameter of a minimum of 650 feet (*c.* 200 metres), a circumference of 681 yards (*c.* 623 metres), and which enclosed 7½ acres (*c.* 3 hectares). Allowing for the close setting of the burials that Toope described, Allcroft argued that as many as 2,000 burials were possible.

It seems most likely that what Toope described is an, as yet, undated rural Anglo-Saxon cemetery. There is, for example, a mass burial of the period in a similar landscape context elsewhere on the Ridgeway (Williams, 2015). An early reference which utilises Toope's observations to suggest this period is that of Mr H.C. Brentnall (quoted in Cunnington, 1933: 169),[14] who argued that the burials were possibly the remains of warriors killed in the battle *aet Cynetan* between the Danes and Saxons in 1006 CE (*cf.* Cleal and Montague, 2001: 14; Pollard and Reynolds, 2002: 234). It is Fergusson (1872: 77–8), however, who first makes the argument based on Toope's observations of the quality of preservation of the bones and his record of the forms the burials took. This is interesting and, following on from his and Kains-Jackson's (1880: 54) observations that Toope's anatomical findings could be trusted, it is interesting to note that one of the notes he made was that the bones were

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large (Fowles, ed., 1980: 52–5). The suggested lack of small (i.e. child) remains adds to the possibility of this being a conflict-related cemetery. There are, however, factors that militate against a battle-related date of 1006 CE for the burials. For example, conflict-related deaths of this period tend to be buried in mass graves, rather than being individual burials in cemeteries in the ordered way Toope suggests. Moreover, the prehistoric barrows, the Sanctuary and other features form part of the boundary between Avebury and West Overton, and Pollard and Reynolds (2002: 234) suggest that this feature was created around 939 CE. Importantly, they go on to argue that the only burials dating to this period related to executed individuals. Whilst it is impossible without the skeletal remains to identify a cause of death, the number of inhumations suggested by Toope's account make this an unlikely scenario. Returning to the issue of the dating of the cemetery, it seems possible that it was early Anglo-Saxon (Pollard and Reynolds, 2002: 233); the lack of grave goods suggested by Toope's account makes it more likely to be late seventh century or later (Pollard and Reynolds, 2002*:* 234).

The view that it was a Saxon cemetery was followed by Stuart Piggott (1958: 237), while Cleal and Montague (2001:14) suggest the burials were likely to be medieval or Roman,[15] and Semple (2003: 79) suggests the possibility that they were early medieval, and possibly conversion period. At the same time, they argue that the burials were probably extended, rather than contracted, and likely supine (Pollard and Reynolds, 2002: 234). To this author, the fact that there was a definite statement of the orientation 'towards the Temple' (Fowles, ed., 1980: 52–5) confirms this fact quite definitively. The cemetery could, of course, be of any date (Williams, 2015); on the basis of the condition of the teeth referred to by Toope, Burl (2002: 141) argues that they are Neolithic, although I cannot see a reason why they could not be of any date prior to tobacco and the greater use of sugar.

Toope's account has also been used to place the location of this possible cemetery. He noted that the burials were located in flat land and, as Cleal and Montague (2001: 14) note, the most level ground surrounding the Sanctuary is to the north of the monument: on the other sides the ground slopes away. This would make it seem likely, however, that the burials would have lain *over* the road from the monument, as evidenced by the fact that, by the time of the Andrews and Dury map of Wiltshire (1773) the road followed the course of the current A4, and Samuel Pepys observed that the stones of the Sanctuary were visible from the road at the time he visited the area (1668). With this in mind, as Cleal and Montague (2001: 14) observe, it is indeed strange that the normally meticulous Toope did not note the fact that the burials were separated from the monument by the road. Excavations of the area have

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failed to locate any trace of the cemetery. Regrettably, it seems that this area, if it was the location of the burials, was probably archaeologically obliterated when the Ridgeway Café was built there; had the burials been to the east, they would have fallen victim to quarrying. Thus, any remains would probably have been removed then (Cleal and Montague, 2001: 14; Pollard and Reynolds, 2002: 234). While unlikely to have been completely removed by Toope, he would certainly have greatly lessened the number present (Williams, 2015). It is important, however, to consider the chronological distance between the two periods of Toope's activity at the Sanctuary, and entertain the possibility suggested by Richard Sugg (2011: 92) that he had returned in between these dates to collect further samples, which will have further lessened the chance of finding extant remains.

The landscape context of the remains documented by Toope has been noted by Semple (2003: 79). She observes that the burials are frequently referred to as being related to the Ridgeway, 'a prehistoric route that was of great significance for communication lines in the Anglo-Saxon period' (2003: 79) but also states that the cluster relates to the crossroads between the Ridgeway and the Mildenhall to Sandy Lane/Verlucio road, also in use in the Anglo-Saxon period. Thus, the cemetery 'was sited at a location which commanded views of two major communication routes'. It is perhaps also of note, given the longevity of land divisions, that the location marks the boundary between Avebury and West Overton parishes (Semple, 2003: 88).

Dr Toope and the long barrow at West Kennet

In contrast to the detailed description of the Toope material from the Sanctuary described above is the other archaeological site with which he is principally associated: West Kennet Long Barrow, also in Wiltshire. Perhaps as a result of the excavations of Stuart Piggott (1958; 1962), although more likely the result of a more complete scientific archaeological history, where the site has been excavated recording its biography, Toope may be most associated with this site. This is ironic, for there is no direct historical evidence for his presence here; he does not refer to it in his correspondence, nor is there any direct or contemporary reference to him being at the site (for example by Aubrey, as has been assumed, e.g. Malone, 1990: 26).

However, in Stukeley's unpublished papers (Bodleian, Gough Maps 231) is the note that 'Dr Took, as they call him, has miserably defaced South Long Barrow [West Kennet Long Barrow] by digging half the length of it. It was most neatly smoothed up to a sharp ridge, to throw off the rain, and some of the stones are very large.' Stukeley also recorded

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the evidence in the form of drawings which he made in 1723–24 (these are reproduced in Piggott, 1962: plate IIa and b). Dr Took is unanimously equated with Toope (e.g. Thurnam, 1860: 408; Piggott, 1958: 236; Malone, 1990: 26). Based on the evidence provided to and by Stukeley, demonstrating that the excavations were prior to 1723, Toope does indeed seem the most likely culprit (*cf*. Piggott, 1962: 4).[16]

When Piggott (1958; 1962) excavated the barrow in 1955–56, he sectioned the mound, revealing the considerable extent of Toope's diggings. Virtually all of the south side of the barrow had been targeted, as was revealed by the presence of craters, some of which had been backfilled with prehistoric and Roman material, together with clay pipe fragments, and the disturbance was clearly visible in section (Piggott, 1962: 4). Considerable attention had been paid to the area of the forecourt and passage of the tomb. Indeed, the capstone of the south-east chamber had been removed and dragged off to the south to allow attempted access to the contents (Piggott, 1958: 236; 1962: 4). The north-east chamber had also been dug into, but in this case, the architecture had been left intact (Piggott, 1962: 4).

It is presumed, quite reasonably (Piggott, 1958: 237; 1962: 4; Malone, 1990: 26) that these excavations were also attempts to retrieve human bones for medicine. This time it seems Toope was unsuccessful, however, since owing to the way the chambers had been backfilled in antiquity, and the formation of the mound, Toope excavated only three feet (c. 91 centimetres) into an eight-feet-deep (c. 2.43 metres) deposit above the primary human remains. However, this suggestion is frequently ignored, and it is assumed he did gain burials from this site (e.g. Dyer, 1990: 55; Perks, 2011: 10; also suggested by Burl, 2002: 278). If, of course, burials were removed at this stage, or indeed in later antiquarian (i.e. pre-Thurnam) periods, we do not know the numbers involved.

It has long been considered fact that the first excavation of West Kennet was by John Thurnam in 1860 (Piggott, 1958: 235; 1962: 4); however, I wonder whether Toope's interventions (given the degree of the damage noted, they must have taken place on a number of occasions) might be considered such. In noting the observations made by Toope regarding the orientation and setting of the burials at the Sanctuary, there is the possibility that anything he might have observed at West Kennet might have been similarly recorded, but not have survived. Toope might equally have recorded non-burial-related material. It is interesting to note, however, that there is nothing in Aubrey's papers to record Toope's potential activity at West Kennet. This suggests a number of possibilities – either the damage was not done by Toope, or perhaps Aubrey did not know of the activity (for example, Toope was the perpetrator, but chose not to report it, perhaps because he did not

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find human remains which was what he considered important). It seems unlikely that any information sent to Aubrey by Toope would not have been retained by someone as reliable as Aubrey and, given that Toope refers to Aubrey as his 'worthy friend' (Fowles, ed., 1980: 52–3), it seems likely that the two would have been in contact if either thought it important.[17]

Dr Toope and Robert Boyle

In considering the intellectual qualities and contemporary standing of Dr Toope, it is beneficial to consider his contributions outside the archaeological sphere. Of note amongst these is his correspondence with the Honourable Robert Boyle (Davis and Thurnam, 1865). Toope wrote to Boyle on at least one occasion – 5 April 1683 (Maddison, 1958: 172 and 191). It is worth recording in some detail here:

> Honoured Sir
> Since my return into the country I have been very ill in a fever, or else this had (to promise) flown sooner into your hands… I was sent for to one Mrs Corle, of Freshford near Bath, who laboured in a fever; and I took in my pocket a whole ounce of Spanish flies pulverised *grosso modo*, for I usually draw blisters with little bags; and after I had filled two or three bags, which could contain no more than a drachm, I lapped all up in a double paper and stuck it between an iron bar and the glass in the gentlewoman's chamber window, the window looking towards the south, and I went off and left my flies as before. About thirteen or fourteen months after, April or May come twelve month, I was sent for to one Mr Sliper of Tunbridge (three miles from Freshford) brother to the gentlewoman Mrs Corle; and when I came I found my patient Mrs Corle there; I told her I must blister her brother, and spoke to have the apothecary sent for, on which she told me I could have brought old ones; if not young ones enough; for, said she, cleaning my chamber window two days since, I took down a paper of Spanish flies you left there after my last sickness; and when I opened your paper, there were multitudes of little flies like your old ones, and being afraid of their motion, I hastily and rudely lapped it up again, and put the paper where I had it. Then I became warm and impatient to see the phoenix from its ashes; she freely offered her man to fetch me the paper, which I accepted of, and then saw of my own eyes, and many others besides myself, thousands of them creeping and crawling about most exactly shaped to the old flies, long and small their wings, as long as their bodies, but of a very faint glittering and shining colour. I kept some of them in boxes with fruits and leaves, and they waxed bigger, and the bigger they grew, various colours came on. My children observing me often visiting and feeding my little fry, in my absence destroyed my stock.

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> I pray Sir give me a taste of that blessed oil, of which you promised the way of consecting [?] and that of refining tin, given you by one Wilden as I take it, for I resolve to work upon that body, so much have I seen to encourage me, and when I am at a loss or stand, I shall beg your assistance, and whatever I do in this kind or any other way, I will communicate and return it back again, as the little rivulet pays the main ocean.
>
> Sir, you must pardon the rudeness of my long nonsensical story, but, if I mistake not, such stories as these ought to be told, that no such circumstances be omitted, for many times the whole matter lies couched under circumstances (though the case does not here so appear) you may give it what philosophical dress you please. Worthy and honoured Sir, I am, yours to command, Robert Toope
>
> To me at the post house, Bath, Somersetshire. *Vise remitte vale.*

In addition to this, it is tempting to imagine further contact, for Boyle, a lifelong sufferer from nosebleeds, was a user of skull medicine. When he used the practice, he found that it seemed to work even before being applied in the usual fashion. He had suffered an unexpected, violent nosebleed whilst at the house of his sister. Having obtained from her the 'moss' from a skull he was going to apply it in the usual manner, by insertion up the nose. Before doing so, however, he was tempted to see if merely holding it in his hand would prove efficacious. The nosebleed not only stopped, but he was not troubled by a nosebleed for some years thereafter (Boyle, 1675).

Discussion

Few people are remembered over 300 years after their death. That Toope is remembered is thanks not to his personal papers, or published works. It is thanks to networks of knowledge distribution. In the first case, it was his communications with contemporaneous scholars – the likes of John Aubrey and Robert Boyle – and there is no reason to discount the possibility that there were more contributions than those known, or that Toope had a wider circle of correspondents. Next, we can see the ways in which his work was used by first antiquarians and then more recent scholars, which has served to maintain his presence in scholarship.

The nature of the correspondences that Toope engaged in was the primary form in which scientific research was communicated in the seventeenth century; letters from one scholar to another (Maddison, 1958: 129). It is to be noted, also, that Toope's letter of 1678 (Fowles, ed., 1980: 52–4) does state that this communication is the precursor to the communication of further 'things of this nature', suggesting that there was more communication between the two which has not survived, and

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it is possible that this might be related to the Sanctuary, West Kennet, or indeed some other site altogether. This fact is important, however, since it does demonstrate that the material communicated was not a one-off.

We can infer also that the information provided by Toope was reliably sourced. The informants used by Aubrey to provide sources of information for his writings were known to have been such, and there is no reason to consider Toope otherwise. That Toope knew in which places to dig in order to retrieve human bones suggests he may have studied the activities of antiquaries either in print or in person. Furthermore, from his examination of the diggings at the Sanctuary, it seems to be the case that he made considered observations, which he reported (*cf*. Fergusson, 1872: 77). The number of times he was cited by later antiquarians and more recent archaeologists, and even more popular sources, is perhaps evidence of the significance of these observations. Stukeley, perhaps, had an axe to grind when scathingly recording him as 'Dr Took'. Toope was, it seems, much more than that, and one can only wonder at what other observations he might have made at other sites, but which have not come down to us in the present day.

Notes

Several people and institutions have contributed to this chapter and the research from which it derives; these include the Society of Antiquaries of London (who provided a generous grant for research in Oxford from the William Lambarde Memorial Fund), the University of Glasgow and the University of Liverpool. Dr Richard Sugg has, on a number of occasions, provided a ready base for discussion of a number of points. Finally, I am grateful to my fellow editors for the invitation to produce this chapter.

1 Richard Savage, 'The Progress of a Divine: a satire', 1735.
2 He was not, however, one of Aubrey's *amici*. Still, Aubrey was well known for corresponding with fellow antiquarians in the production of *Templa Druidum* (Burl, 2010: 182).
3 There is a Katherine Toope, baptised 22 September 1686, daughter of Robert and Hannah Toope, in Stourton (Ellis, ed., 1887: 18).
4 It seems likely to me that someone as mobile as Toope would have relied upon local knowledge to inform him on the nature of local antiquities which he could have used as sources of human remains.
5 Toope signed himself with the suffix MD, although it is not evident where he was educated. A link with Oxford University has been considered, but a search of the directory of alumni for the appropriate period (Foster, 1891) has located only one Robert Toope, of Trinity College; but he matriculated 8 December 1658 and probably died 18 September 1671 (Foster, 1891: 1496).
6 '…among others, I formerly observed a modest servant of Dr Toope, sometimes since a laudable practitioner at the Bath, who knowing her self *[sic]*

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honest desir'd me not to report there was any Milk *[sic]* upon the Blood *[sic]* for fear it might be thought that she was with Child *[sic]*' (Guidott, 1708: 55).

7 This activity is frequently (e.g. Sugg, 2013: 829) misinterpreted as 1684 and/or being at West Kennet.

8 Although Grinsell (1936: 150–51) states this was in the early eighteenth century, this must be an error.

9 The normally scrupulous Colt-Hoare (1821: 79) described the Sanctuary erroneously, suggesting that, from this passage in *Britannia,* Camden must have seen Aubrey's *Templa Druidum (Monumenta Britannica)*, and thus Toope's letter. On the basis of the dates (Camden died in 1623), this cannot have been the case; more likely it was inserted by Edmund Gibson in his 1695 translation of the text from Latin into English (*cf.* Fowles, ed., 1980: 23), to which he made considerable additions, which suggests that Gibson may have had access to Aubrey himself (Aubrey dying in 1697). There were further editions of Gibson's version in 1722, 1753 and 1772. Equally, it could have been first reported in Richard Gough's (1789) edition of *Britannia*; versions would have been available to Colt-Hoare. However, in the collections at Stourhead (the ancestral home of Colt-Hoare), in addition to Camden's 1587 edition (the second – National Trust NT 3006341), there is a version dated 1730, and so presumably Gibson's 1722 version (National Trust NT 3196402). The error is repeated by Higgins (2007 [1829]: xxix), who himself probably got it from Colt-Hoare, or a reading thereof.

10 Long (1858b: 66) suggests that Aubrey's dimensions for the stones at the Sanctuary are confirmed by Toope; evidently the opposite must be the case.

11 Here, Smith does not reference the source of his information, and also states that Toope was 'then living at Marlborough'; without a reference it is not clear whether Toope was genuinely living or just staying at Marlborough.

12 It is of note that Brooks makes reference to other antiquarian sources, not least Camden and Leland.

13 It is interesting to note that Kains-Jackson (1880: 54) is the only person to refer to Toope as 'one of the Carolean antiquaries'. Perhaps the absence of such a sobriquet is reasonable, as there is no evidence that Toope had any interest in archaeological sites except for their likelihood of producing human remains. Of note however, in relation to this chapter, are the observations he made as a by-product of his medicinal work.

14 It is noteworthy that this observation is frequently attributed to Maud Cunnington (e.g. Cleal and Montague, 2001: 14; Pollard and Reynolds, 2002: 234). It was not; rather Mr H.C. Brentnall, as she noted (Cunnington, 1933: 169).

15 The possibility of a Romano-British date for the cemetery is also entertained, albeit briefly, by Pollard and Reynolds (2002: 234)

16 The author is taken by the view (Fowler and Harris, 2015) that Toope's excavations represent a new imagining or interpretation of the tomb.

17 Given the thoroughness with which Aubrey surveyed the Avebury region (see Fowles, ed., 1980), it is surprising that there is no mention of West Kennet Long Barrow, either in drawings or in writing.

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