



ARCHAEOLOGY

The Newsletter of the Berkshire Archaeological Society

Spring 2015

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DAY SCHOOL REMINDER

The Society's annual day school returns to Wokingham this year with another exciting programme of recent archaeological work in Berkshire. It will be held on Saturday 7 March at The Cornerstone, Norreys Avenue, Wokingham RG40 1UE from 10.00 am to 4.15 pm, cost £10 payable at the door (please note that lunch is not provided). Please consult the BAS website (www.berksarch.co.uk) or contact Trevor Coombs (tacoombs1@gmail.com) for further details.

Dates for your diary

Saturday 14th February 2015 *Archaeology on Saturdays lecture*

Early Bronze Age women by Alice Rogers at RISC starting 14:15

Wednesday 4th March 2015: *Anglo-Saxon discussion group*

in Conference Room 3, RISC starting 14:00

Saturday 7th March 2015: **Archaeology in Berkshire Day School**

at The Cornerstone, Norreys Avenue, Wokingham RG40 1UE,
10.00 to 16:15

Saturday 14th March 2015 *Archaeology on Saturdays lecture*

Lindisfarne by David Petts at RISC starting 14:15

Wednesday 1st April 2015: *Anglo-Saxon Berkshire discussion group*

in Conference Room 3, RISC starting 14:00

Saturday 18th April 2015 *Archaeology on Saturdays lecture*

Old Windsor by David Lewis at RISC starting 14:15

Wednesday 6th May 2015 *Anglo-Saxon Berkshire discussion group*

in Conference Room 3, RISC starting 14:00

Friday 9th May 2015 **Spring Tour** starts Reading Station

Wednesday 3rd June 2015 **Visit to Anglo-Saxon West Berkshire and Wantage**

From our chairman

Dear Members,

The Berkshire Archaeological Society is growing and you will notice in this edition that you are invited to participate in its activities. There are **real opportunities** to broaden your interest in archaeology by joining our friends for great fun on the May Tour, (only £335, four days shared room – phone Ron 0118 939 4044 – it's not too late!), volunteering for one of our field work groups, learn how to auger! (Andrew 0118 973 2882), joining the Garden Project (first meeting in April phone Ann 01628 825288) and helping Trevor (email: tacoombs1@gmail.com) to book interesting lectures.

Good news! We have a new Librarian, Deborah Loe who is gearing up to manage our large collection. Those of you with email will begin to receive a monthly **News Sheet** in February – a trial venture until July – if you don't have email send Anne Harrison(anne@jaharrison.me.uk) a relative's or friend's email address and ask them to phone you with the news.

As they say on Radio Berkshire – **'BE PART OF IT'**.

Ann Griffin - Chairman

BERKSHIRE

Archaeology on Saturdays

Help wanted

Trevor Coombs has organised several seasons of Saturday lectures but now he wants some help to organise the 2015-16 season. If you have contacts in the archaeological world and would like to influence the choice of speakers for our lectures, please contact Trevor Coombs (email: tacoombs1@gmail.com).

Oxford before the University

A talk by Anne Dodd on 15 November 2014

About 35 members enjoyed this interesting talk about the early development of Oxford, from its beginnings as a prehistoric ritual complex to the foundation of the University in the 13th century.

Excavation at the Radcliffe Infirmary site revealed two sides of a Neolithic rectangular enclosure, dated to 3530-3360 cal BC. A Bronze Age barrow was raised over it around 1900-1800 cal BC, suggesting that it remained important for a long time. Just to the east of St Giles church and south of Keble Road, part of the ditch of a 155m diameter henge was discovered: this was 6-9m wide at the top and nearly 3 m deep, but it is not known whether it contained a stone circle and there is, as yet, no evidence for the outer bank or entrances. Bronze Age barrows are known from parch marks in the University Parks across to Port Meadow and beyond. This early ceremonial complex was respected by the later Bronze and Iron Ages as there is no evidence for later occupation until a Roman farmstead was built in the University Parks area. The main Silchester-Alchester road ran further to the east, where it served a large Roman pottery industry centred in Headington, Cowley and Blackbird Leys. The Romans were followed by the Anglo-Saxons, whose early settlements were characterised by timber halls and sunken huts: one hut was found on the Infirmary site and a more extensive cluster of 12 at Littlemore beneath the Science Park.

Around 700 AD the Saxon princess Frideswide established a minster church in Oxford, which is believed to lie underneath Christchurch Cathedral. Timber piles found deep beneath the Abingdon Road hint at a Saxon river crossing nearby. Anglo-Saxon England grew rich in the 8th and 9th centuries and attracted the attention of Viking raiders. Alfred of Wessex established the towns of the Burghal Hidage network to provide shelter for the local populace in the event of a raid at Oxford, Wallingford, Cricklade and probably Sashes Island at Cookham. These were designed as defended towns where markets could be held in relative safety. The Saxon town of Oxford marks its appearance as a planned medieval town with a street grid more or less along the lines of modern streets. The town rampart was faced with timber and later with stone and part of the Saxon wall is exposed at Oxford Castle. The late 10th and early 11th centuries saw a second wave of Viking attacks and a mass burial of 34 young men found near the Oxford henge and dated to the late 10th century is believed to represent a massacre of (not by) Vikings. By the early 11th century the main streets were lined with narrow tenement plots with large timber halls behind them. The

presence of oyster shells attests to trade, in this case probably with Southampton.

The Norman Conquest brought change and the building of Oxford Castle in 1071, which destroyed and overlies Saxon halls. St George's Tower, however, is thought to be late Saxon in date, designed to guard the western approach into Oxford. Legend tells us that during the civil war between Stephen and Matilda, Matilda escaped from this tower during the siege of Oxford Castle in 1141 to find sanctuary at Wallingford. St Frideswide's church was rebuilt in Romanesque style to form the 12th century heart of the present cathedral and, as the population grew, Oxford spilled out into suburbs. Many religious houses had been established by the 13th century and the University formally began in 1214 on the authority of the Pope. But Oxford was already an old and important town long before the University began.

Janet Sharpe

Climate and societal change

A talk by Dominik Fleitmann, University of Reading, on Saturday 13 December 2014

Dominik Fleitmann introduced himself as a geologist, not an archaeologist, and stressed the importance of working across the disciplines. We live in a rapidly changing world: a series of graphs, all with 'hockey stick' curves rising sharply at the end, was used to demonstrate the rapid and recent increase in many environmental factors including atmospheric carbon dioxide and methane concentrations, ozone depletion, average global temperature, floods, exploitation of marine resources, human pollution (nitrogen flux), loss of rainforest and woodland, and loss of biodiversity. The present rate of change is unprecedented and we are fully aware of the problems – but will we use our knowledge wisely?

Proxy data for climate change in the past can be found in, among other things, historical paintings and documents, lake sediment cores, ocean sediments, ice cores and tree rings (the thickness of which is closely related to summer temperature and rainfall). Fleitmann is a pioneer in the use of cave stalagmites as a source of proxy climate data, and has worked in Yemen and Oman. Stalagmites contain trace elements that can be used to study environmental change, and the isotopic composition of fossil rainwater trapped within them records temperature changes. Palaeoclimatic reconstructions using proxy data can be combined with archaeological data to re-examine societal changes in the past.

A very early example of human societal change linked to climatic change concerns the migration of modern man out of Africa. There is archaeological evidence that this migration followed at least two routes: along the Nile valley and into the Levant, and across the narrow strait at the entrance to the Red

Sea to the southern Arabian Peninsula and thence into Asia. Today this region is impassable desert but aerial photographs show the presence of ancient lake deposits and fossil rainwater exists beneath the desert surface. Stone tools are found 'everywhere' and rock art shows ostriches, fishes, crocodiles and hippos. A section cut through the upper 70cm of a two-and-a-half-million-years-old stalagmite from a cave in Yemen shows irregular layers representing different growth phases. The stalagmite could only grow when the annual rainfall was between 300-3500mm (today it is only about 50mm) and these pluvial periods were dated using the uranium-thorium technique. The most recent period was dated to 130,000-120,000 years ago when the 'corridor' opened for early human dispersal out of Africa.

The monsoon is stronger in warm periods and reached parts of Africa and Arabia where it does not occur today. A stalagmite from southern Oman shows an increase in rainfall at the beginning of the Holocene that reached a maximum around 9000-8000 years ago and has subsequently declined. No archaeological sites older than 10,500 years are found in the Saharan and Arabian deserts but with increased rainfall people moved into the desert. When the monsoon intensity decreased after about 7000 years ago they moved away again.

The early kingdoms of southern Arabia, such as Hadramaut and Saba, were well-known by the Romans who called this region Arabia Felix. These kingdoms formed part of an international trading network and established cities and ports in what is now desert. Showing an advanced technology, they built sophisticated irrigation systems and terraced fields. One of the last of these kingdoms was Himyar (c.100 BC to AD 525) which collapsed due to conflict with the kingdom of Aksum in present-day Sudan. The fall of Himyar led to a 'dark age' which ended with the spectacular rise of Islam in AD 622. The most likely cause of this sudden change was an ecological crisis in the 6th century that left a socio-political vacuum that was filled by a new religion. Oxygen isotope analysis of a stalagmite from northern Oman provided evidence for a megadrought around AD 500 which would have caused a severe drop in agricultural output creating social tensions: the Aksum invasion caught Himyar at its weakest point. People need to believe, and with the collapse of their social structure they need new ideas to believe in. This is probably why the survivors of Himyar followed Mohammad, who was able to reunite the scattered communities.

Climate affects bioproductivity and hence economy and food supply. Any disruption leads to social disturbance, conflict and human migration. In turn this leads to famine, disease epidemics and reduced population. The Black Death is now

understood to be related to climate change. Knowing this, how will we deal with the 250 million climate change refugees who will be moving north by the middle of this century? **Janet Sharpe**

Domesday Book; A hidden History

A talk by David Roffe, on Saturday 17 January 2015

David Roffe gave an entertaining talk on the Domesday Book and what research has revealed about its genesis. First, David showed examples of how Domesday has been used for devious purposes. It is not uncommon for estate agents to tell their clients that the house they are looking at was, 'mentioned in Domesday'. More sinister is the use by Islamic insurgents to claim that it demonstrates the iniquities of western governments!

Domesday Book was published in two volumes, both of which are in the national Archives at Kew, but in a poor condition. Volume 1 was a summary of the Terra Regis, the king's lands with another survey known as the 'Geld inquest' designed to raise money to pay William's mercenaries. Volume two investigated all other estates and was compiled, not for William 1st but for his son William Rufus (1087-1100) between 1090 and 1101. The coverage of this 'inquest' is remarkable since it includes 90% of all existing settlements. Reading has an entry which talks about people of the time and places like Caversham. However the book omitted the authors' names, its date of publication and said nothing about livestock.

The Domesday 'Inquest', as it was called, originated because William had a cash crisis in 1085. So he consulted all the barons at Salisbury in 1086. At the time feudal lords paid no tax because they were 'in service to the king'. But the king needed an army to defend England from the Danes who were threatening to invade. As a result of the conference, the king agreed to stop billeting mercenaries on their lordships, subject to them providing armies for national use. However, he could not trust all his barons so he ordered the survey of all their fiefdoms in 1086. William died in Rouen whilst fighting the French with his new army, so Domesday was finished during the reign of William Rufus c. 1101. David believes that as William 1st consulted his barons and came to a mutually satisfactory agreement that the book represents the beginnings of democracy.

Domesday is now being prepared in a new digital edition by the University of East Anglia which will be subject to more analysis which should provide much more information about Anglo Saxon and Norman England. **Trevor Coombs**

Reference: Roffe, D. 2007. *Decoding Domesday*, Boydell

Fieldwork projects

This is the first year, for many years, when the Society has a programme of fieldwork. The table below lists the fieldwork projects which are being discussed and the state of the project plans. In the table below, the names in bold identify the project leaders who are members of Council. Please contact them if you want a copy of their project plan or want to join their project.

One of the benefits of archaeological fieldwork is that it provides communities with tangible evidence of their local heritage. The Society is planning to support this aspect of archaeological fieldwork by providing an on-site presence while the fieldwork is progressing so that people living nearby can come along and see what is happening. Ideally, this on-site presence should take the form of a gazebo or tent with notice boards, evidence from the site and somebody to answer questions. If you fancy sitting on an archaeological site and explaining the site to visitors, please contact Ann Griffin or Andrew Hutt (see contact details on the last page of this newsletter)

Project title	Objectives and status	Leader/Timescale
Rose Street Survey	To survey and record all the heritage buildings in Rose Street, Wokingham There is an approved plan for this project	Barrie Randall / Andrew Hutt / Nigel Spencer Jan to Dec 2015
Garden project	To encourage everybody to collect and identify small finds that they find while gardening at home	Ann Griffin Jan to Dec 2015
James Edward Austen-Leigh and Knowl Hill	To research the relationship between James Edward Austen-Leigh, the nephew of Jane Austen, and Knowl Hill There is plan for this project	Ann Griffin/Deborah Loe Jan-Mar 2015
Blounts Court	Geophysics and auger survey of building R3 at Blounts Court This is a joint project with the Berkshire Archaeology Research Group The plan for this project is still being discussed	Andrew Hutt / Ann Griffin / Nigel Spencer April 2015
La Hyde DMV, Purley geophysics	Geophysics survey of the site of La Hyde, west of Purley on Thames The plan for this project is still being discussed	Andrew Hutt / John Chapman June 2015
Woolley Hall geophysics	Geophysics survey of Woolley Hall fields Plan required	Ann Griffin / Andrew Hutt August 2015
Streatley Meadow excavation	Excavation of trench in Streatley Meadows Plan required	Ann Griffin / Trevor Coombs April or Sept 2015
Loddon Valley environment project	Environmental augering and maybe geophysics on land in the London Valley Plan required	Colin Forrestal



View of the site of La Hyde (© John Chapman)

Membership subscriptions

Subscriptions to the Society are due in April 2015 for the year to April 2016, except for those who joined after 1 January 2015. Subscription rates are £15 for an individual and £20 for a couple at the same address and are due on 10 April.

A number of members already pay by Standing Order or the equivalent, and we are most grateful to them for this. A **renewal form is enclosed with this newsletter** for those who prefer to pay by cheque, and also to record any changes in a member's name, address, telephone number or email. The latter is particularly important as the bulk of communication with you now is carried out electronically. Thank you. (Anne Harrison - Membership Secretary - anne@jaharrison.me.uk)

Storage space wanted

As the Society increases its involvement in fieldwork, it is looking for space to store fieldwork equipment and probably some of the boxes holding the Berkshire Archaeology Research Library. If anybody has a building, a garage or space in a garage which the Society could use to hold its equipment please contact Ann Griffin or Andrew Hutt (see contact details on the last page of this newsletter).

The Anglo-Saxon Discussion Group

Meeting 3rd December 2014

This was the first meeting of this group, so the opening talk was an introduction to Anglo-Saxon Berkshire and the project.

The meeting started with a review of recent research into Anglo-Saxon Berkshire including the Solent-Thames Research Framework. It discussed the different types of site relevant to this period including: meeting places; military installations such as forts and burhs; towns and markets; religious and ritual sites and cemeteries; and settlements. It discussed the traditional Anglo-Saxon chronology of Early, Middle and Late Anglo-Saxon periods.

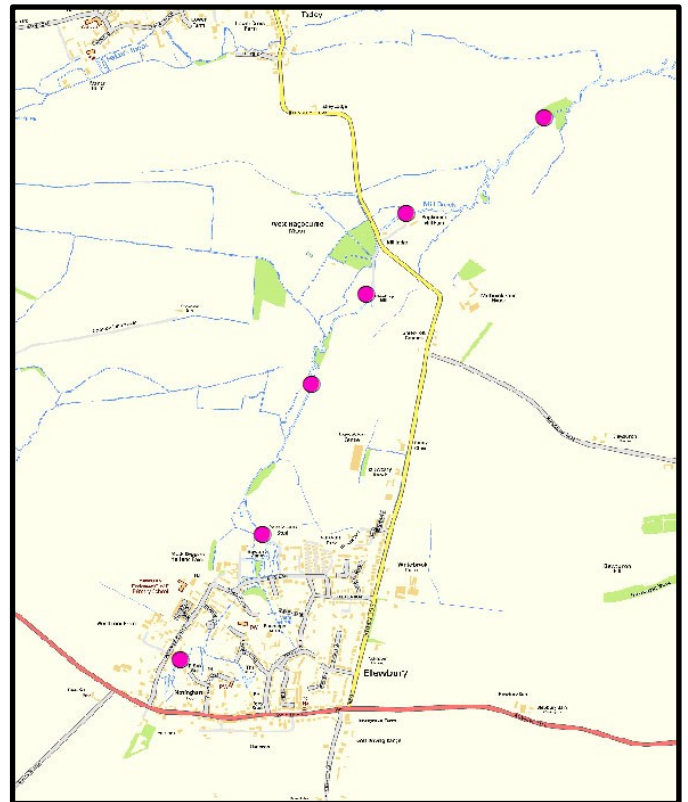
The meeting ended with a discussion of a possible social structuring of the evidence based on five communities embracing the secular elite, religious elite, and trading, urban and rural communities. **Andrew Hutt**

Meeting 7th January 2015

This meeting started with a presentation by Dave Carless on Saxon mills in the Blewbury Hundred. He began with an analysis of historic documents including Domesday Book, Anglo-Saxon charters, Abbey cartularies, pipe rolls and early maps. He then presented a case study based on Blewbury, identified the site of six mills along the line of Mill Brook which runs north of the village and showed how parish boundaries had been laid out and fragmented so that the villages of Blewbury and East and West Hagbourne had access to mills.

The second half of the meeting was devoted to a brief presentation by Andrew Hutt of a project run by University College, London to develop a database of archaeological and

place name evidence relating to Early Anglo-Saxon sites across Southern England. The outcome of this was an agreement that the Society should ask Sue Harrington, the project leader, to let them have a copy of the data relevant to the Berkshire Study area. **Andrew Hutt**



Sites of Anglo-Saxon mills along the Mill Brook, Blewbury © Dave Carless

Hello from our new Librarian

I'd like to introduce myself. My name is Deborah Loe and I live in Maidenhead. I'm a relatively new member of the Society, and thought that I'd like to get involved.

I'm learning about the Society's libraries myself at the moment. We've got one in the Berkshire Record Office, which I'm hoping to visit soon, and the other, the Berkshire Archaeology Research Library, is held in boxes scattered across Berkshire in members' homes/garages.

Can those of you who store any of these boxes let me know what you've got? There is a list – but I understand that boxes have moved, so I'd like to update it. Would anyone be prepared to give a home to some of the boxes in the future? There are changes afoot. **Deborah Loe**

Tales from the Theoretical Archaeology Group Conference



This year, the Theoretical Archaeology Group (TAG) Conference was in Manchester and as usual the programme covered a wide variety of subjects. Most of the sessions I went to were chosen because they discussed the social aspects of archaeology.

One session discussed *Imperial Conquests* by reviewing the impact of Imperial powers on the people they conquered. This series of lectures showed how recent archaeological work in Britain, Africa and the Balkans, is providing evidence that the conquered peoples shaped their future societies at least as much as the Romans. These studies provide more evidence that may enable us to understand what happened in Roman Berkshire.

Another session I attended focussed on the Social impact of Archaeology. These lectures explained how getting groups and teams of people to investigate their archaeology helped:

- Community cohesion in Liverpool
- Communities in Scotland develop a better sense of the place they live
- Communities in Sheffield to adjust to a major change resulting from the closure of their local market;
- Rehabilitate soldiers who suffered from injury and/or mental trauma while on active service.

These thoughts helped re-inforce the significance of the changes we made in the Society in 2014 when we introduced working groups. Looking forward, I am hoping to extend our next project plans by including a social impact statement and thereby ensure that the work of the Society is recognised by and benefits the communities in which we work. **Andrew Hutt**

Input to the newsletter

If you have an archaeological story which you feel would interest the Society, please send it to Andrew Hutt the acting newsletter editor by 20th April 2015

BERKSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY



Patron: H.M. THE QUEEN

President: Professor

Michael Fulford CBE FBA FSA

The Society was founded in 1871 and for over 100 years has encouraged and supported archaeological activities in Berkshire.

Everybody with an interest in archaeology is welcome to attend our meetings and join the Society. It does not matter whether your interest in archaeology is new found or long standing, the Society offers activities from regular lectures and outings to post-excavation research.

All members receive a regular newsletter, full of news about events in Berkshire. The Berkshire Archaeological Journal is also free to members.

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