



# ARCHAEOLOGY

The Newsletter of the Berkshire Archaeological Society

Spring 2011

Vol.13, No.1

## DAY SCHOOL REMINDER!

The Annual Day School will be held on Saturday 5 March from 10.00 am to 4.30 pm at The Cornerstone, Norreys Avenue, Wokingham RG40 1UE. The cost is £10, payable at the door (no concessions). See previous newsletter for outline of programme.

## Congratulations to Professor Michael Fulford

On behalf of all the members of the Berkshire Archaeological Society we send our congratulations to Professor Mike Fulford on the occasion of him being made CBE. This is a remarkable award, coming as it does so soon after the Reading University Archaeology Department received the Queen's Award for Archaeology. This is also a timely award for Mike after the many years that he has devoted to research, writing and teaching archaeology. May he long continue to be such a successful archaeologist.

**Andrew Hutt and Trevor Coombs**

## West Berkshire Historic Environment Action Plan - Consultation

West Berkshire is fortunate in having a rich and varied historic environment, which survives as physical reminders of the processes and events that have created the world we see around us. It can be seen in the everyday and in the extraordinary, in the towns and villages and in the countryside, in ancient remains and modern buildings.

The West Berkshire Heritage Forum, an alliance that aims to encourage partnership working to protect and promote the district's heritage, recognises that it is important that a shared vision is developed. It has therefore been preparing a plan that seeks to highlight what is special and important about the local historic environment, to examine what the key challenges are, to explore what opportunities might exist in the coming years and to establish what the priorities for action should be. The intention is that the plan will be shared by all those interested in the historic environment.

The West Berkshire Historic Environment Action Plan (HEAP) has reached a draft stage and the West Berkshire Heritage Forum now seeks the views of all interested in this area. The draft plan can be downloaded from <http://www.westberks.gov.uk/HEAP>. A short questionnaire can also be downloaded from the website which we hope you will find the time to complete and return.

West Berkshire Council's Heritage Service has agreed to support the Forum by running this consultation exercise and collating the comments that are received. We would be grateful if you could return the completed questionnaires to [dcoe@westberks.gov.uk](mailto:dcoe@westberks.gov.uk), or send them to Duncan Coe, Archaeological Officer, West Berkshire Council, West Street House, West Street, Newbury RG14 1BZ. *Please note that the closing date for comments is Monday 14 March 2011.*

**Duncan Coe**

## Spring Tour 2012

Next year's Spring Tour will take place from Friday 11 to Monday 14 May 2012 and will be based at Weston-super-Mare (Smiths Hotel) for visits to Bristol, Somerset, north Dorset and south-west Wiltshire. More details and an application form will be circulated with the next newsletter. (Barrie Randall)

## The next issue:

Contributions are invited from all BAS members for the Summer issue of the newsletter. Please send your contributions to reach the Editor before Friday 6 May.

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## Kennet Valley Gravels: an Archaeological Resource Assessment Seminar

A seminar outlining the results of the Kennet Valley Gravels Archaeological Assessment project will be held on **Thursday 3 March 2011** at Shaw House in Newbury. This project has been undertaken by West Berkshire Council Archaeology Service and Museum of London Archaeology (MOLA) with funding provided by English Heritage through the Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund. The primary aim of the project is to improve knowledge of the archaeological resource of the aggregate producing areas of West Berkshire. Objectives for the project include:-

- Developing an archaeological research agenda and strategy for aggregates areas.
- Developing historic environment policies and mitigation strategies for aggregates areas.
- Increasing understanding of archaeology and aggregates and facilitating further dialogue between archaeologists, minerals planners, the public and the aggregates industry.

The project seminar aims to present the results of the project, promote discussion about the nature and significance of the archaeological resource, discuss how current approaches to archaeological exploration and mitigation can be improved, and begin a more positive dialogue with the industry.

If you would like to attend this event please contact Duncan Coe at [dcoe@westberks.gov.uk](mailto:dcoe@westberks.gov.uk), or Duncan Coe, Archaeological Officer, West Berkshire Council, West Street House, West Street, Newbury RG14 1BZ. There is no charge for this event, but prior booking is essential. (**Duncan Coe**)

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## The Iron Age exhibition goes to Newbury Central Library

One of the final outputs from the Iron Age project that was sponsored by the Society was an exhibition: *Living in the Iron Age in and around Berkshire*. In January, I wrote to 19 museums and local studies libraries in the project's study area inviting them to host this work. The exhibition summarises the evidence of the Iron Age in the area and reinterprets the archaeological remains found in and around Berkshire over the last 200 years.

As a result, the exhibition has been put on display in the entrance to Newbury Central Library. Ruth Walker, the Libraries' Promotions Co-ordinator, invited me to a meeting on Tuesday 1 February so she could see the exhibition posters and within 10 minutes she was busy clearing the library entrance and putting up our exhibition. Great coverage for the Society!



It will remain at the Library until Saturday 19 February 2011. Opening times are Monday, Tuesday and Thursday 9.00 am to 7.00 pm, Wednesday and Friday 9.00 am to 5.00 pm, and Saturday 9.30 am to 4.00 pm.

If anybody has access to a venue where they could display this exhibition, please let me know. (**Andrew Hutt**)

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## Berkshire Archaeological Journal 79

I am delighted to tell you that the next issue of the *Berkshire Archaeological Journal*, volume 79: **Prehistoric settlement at Southlea Farm, Datchet**, has now been sent to the printers. This journal is a monograph recording work undertaken by the Datchet Village Society on a site with evidence of occupation from the Bronze Age to Roman times.

Congratulations are due to the author Julia Martin of the Datchet Village Society, and to Catherine Petts who edits the journal, for bringing this to fruition. Copies will be available at the March meeting if you want to collect the journal in person and save the Society the cost of postage. (**Andrew Hutt**)

### Berkshire Archaeology Research Group forthcoming events:

**Wednesday 30 March 2011:** 7.30 pm, Spring Quarterly Open Meeting: Jill Greenaway, Curator of Archaeology at the Museum of Reading on *Secrets of the depths: the Thames Conservancy Collection*. Following the tea/coffee break, Jill York will give a short talk on *Thames metalwork: a Bronze Age perspective*, in the de Vitre Room at The Cornerstone, Norreys Avenue, Wokingham RG40 1UE. Non-members are welcome (£2 at the door).

For further information, please contact Janet Firth at [firth@doctors.org.uk](mailto:firth@doctors.org.uk) or tel. 0118 978 7434.

## Reports of BAS Meetings

### **The buildings of Burford: David Clark of the Oxfordshire Buildings Record gave a fascinating talk on the construction and history of some of the 200 Grade II homes in Burford on Saturday 16 October.**

The preservation of Burford's medieval houses may be explained by the fact that neither the railway nor the A40 entered the town. Burford started as a Saxon *burh* and the Normans built a spectacular church with a 'dog-tooth' decoration over the entrance. The town thrived in the boom of the medieval wool industry when merchants built grand stone houses around timber 'cruck' frames during the 12th and 13th centuries. Medieval carpentry is ubiquitous in Burford, with attics displaying complicated, inter-twining joinery. Only a few houses have been dated to confirm their medieval origins. The first peak in house building was around 1500 and the second came between 1650 and 1700. As the town thrived in the 18th century, coaching inns with high arches for the postillion to pass through were constructed for the Italian and other European wool merchants to meet and complete their deals. The inns were at the top of the pub hierarchy, whilst taverns were for farmers and ale houses were for their workers. The type of stone used to construct the houses told the truth about the builders' credit worthiness. Randomly laid 'rubble' stone was the cheapest, followed by 'worked' rubble, then half-dressed stone, and, most expensive of all, dressed blocks of stone laid square. The 18th century in Burford was prosperous due to the visitors who came by coach to stay in the town. The owners of medieval houses re-fronted their properties and raised their roofs, sometimes to let out new bedrooms. Some owners who rebuilt during the 'window tax' period (1696-1851) put in two windows separated by 12 inches of stone work. This arrangement was taxed as a single window, whereas any wider gap would be taxed as two windows. So tax avoidance was alive and well in middle class 18th century Burford. (Trevor Coombs)

### **Celtic art: Jennifer Foster from Reading University described the distinctive art style of the aristocratic and warrior-based society of the European Iron Age on Saturday 20 November.**

Celtic art is decorative and abstract, and was applied to functional objects of metal, wood, stone, occasionally pottery and possibly human skin. The main objects decorated were weapons, horse equipment, torcs, brooches and feasting paraphernalia such as cauldrons. It was not peasant art. It contains some designs inherited from the Late Bronze Age and includes oriental elements ultimately derived from Hittite art and introduced via Greece. These designs are also found in Etruscan art, where back-to-back S-shapes, palmettes and ivy leaves were used as borders around figurative motifs on the backs of bronze mirrors. The Celts adopted only this marginal art, so that Celtic mirror-backs carry various combinations of S-shapes and plant-like tendrils. Other typical motifs in Britain, where Celtic art first became established in around the 3rd century BC, include the curved-sided triangle and its variant the three-legged triskele, trumpet shapes and the crescentic pelta. Beasts also figured in Celtic art, most famously the crested-back boar figurines that may once have adorned helmets, horned bulls' heads on cauldron rims and fire dogs, and 'dragonesque' horses on coinage and brooches. Birds of prey and stylised human heads with bulging eyes and curled moustaches have also been found, and numerous 'hidden' faces of birds and humans have been described among the S-shapes and tendrils of intricate designs. Celtic art disappeared in Roman Britain but continued in Ireland and also in Wales and northern Britain to some extent on metalwork. The triskele continued with the pelta into the 6th-7th centuries AD in Britain and the 7th-8th century penannular brooches from Tara in Ireland also carry the triskele, perhaps now as a symbol of the Holy Trinity. In Britain, this later Celtic art absorbed some Anglo-Saxon designs such as interlacing and reached its final glory in early medieval manuscripts, including the Durrow 'carpet' page of the 8th century AD, which shows curved-sided triangles, triskeles, peltae, horse heads and broken-backed scrolls. (Janet Sharpe)

### **Roman to Saxon continuity: during the course of, at times, a controversial talk on 11 December, Martin Henig told us that he believed that 'the biggest hoax pulled on Britain was the Anglo-Saxon invasion'.**

He has found evidence for continuity from Roman Britain to the Anglo-Saxons in Christian artefacts, churches and personal jewellery. Thus in many parts of Britain it was a peaceful transition. The vehicle for this transition had started under Constantine, when the emperor in 314 invited by letter 30-40 Catholic bishops to attend the Council of Arles. This was the first important international meeting of Christian bishops. From this time onwards Christianity spread slowly in Britain, as may be seen in some 4th century mosaics and wall paintings in churches and villas. Mosaic portraits of Christ appear along with the chi-rho symbol in places like Lullingstone villa and Hinton St Mary church in Devon in the period 350-360. However there were competitors to Christianity, such as the cults of Orpheus at Littlecote villa and of Nodens at Lydney temple. Itinerant Christian bishops kept up the pressure by baptising people in baptismal buckets with Christian symbolism. Christianity was being adopted by rich families, as the Hoxne dinner service attests with the chi-rho mark on the silver, but many families were still invoking pagan gods like Bacchus, as shown on the Mildenhall treasure from Suffolk. These late Roman buried treasure troves indicate that all was not well with the state of Britannia and we know that the coinage ceased in 402, the Roman army had left by 407 and in the following year Britons threw out Roman administrators. The time had arrived for Britons to fend for themselves. Lifestyles were much diminished as villa mosaics were patched with cement through lack of money. Life continued in the early 5th century as examples show at Chedworth villa and in the towns of St Albans and Colchester. But these sub-Roman cultures were being diluted by Germanic metal work carrying Christian and pagan designs. The East Challow belt buckle depicts a peacock pecking at a vine and a chalice. A Christian/pagan brooch from Germany found in Suffolk portrays a boar's head with a Christian symbol. Martin believes that Gildas and Bede had hidden agendas when writing about the Saxons entering Britain. He said both authors were more concerned to show that the people of Britain were descendants of the Jews, who arrived in Britain as Saxons in the 5th century, than the truth, which was that the Saxons came peacefully and progressively changed the lives of Britons in the eastern half of Britain. (Trevor Coombs)

## Ritual, society and power in and around Iron Age Berkshire: a talk given by BAS Chairman Andrew Hutt on Saturday 15 January (based on the content of the *Berkshire Archaeological Journal*, volume 78).

This talk was broad in scope, covering changes in settlement patterns, ritualisation and social differentiation throughout the 800-year period of the British Iron Age, centred in Berkshire. Within this area, in the Early Iron Age (c.800-400 BC) hillforts seem not to have been permanently occupied but served as refugia and were used for storing grain. Come the Middle Iron Age (c.400-100 BC) many hillforts were rebuilt with double ramparts, although this did not render them totally defensible. Instead their primary purpose seems to have been for rituals and social gatherings. In the Early Iron Age people seem to have lived in small self-contained settlements. By the Middle Iron Age sites had begun to show craft specialisation with evidence for trading, and by the Late Iron Age (c.100 BC-AD 43) some people were living in planned towns (*oppida*).

Evidence suggests that iron working was ritualised in the earliest Iron Age. At Hartshill Copse there is evidence for iron working as early as 1000 BC and roundhouses and lines of posts indicate an alignment with the setting sun. Relatively few intact burials are known from the Early Iron Age and excarnation may have been the rule, followed by the ritual deposition of isolated bones in settlement areas and along boundaries. In the Middle Iron Age ritual activity was centred on hillforts with the careful deposition of human and animal bones in reused grain storage pits. Large postholes at Winklebury Camp may have held totem poles; these stood either side of a four-times rebuilt roundhouse that may have been used for ritual activities. Discrete temple sites appear in the Late Iron Age, as at Weycock Hill and Wanborough (Surrey). At the same time ritual deposits were made in rivers (such as the famous Battersea Shield). Organised religion is evidenced by the discovery of a priestly headdress at Wanborough – and descriptions of druids by Classical authors.

These developments throughout the Iron Age point to increasing social cohesion and political power, and this supposition is supported by pottery and coin evidence. By the Early Iron Age, distinct social groups can be identified by the pottery that they used and community power began to be demonstrated in certain ways, such as by the cutting of the Uffington White Horse and, by the Middle Iron Age, the construction of banjo enclosures on the Downs. And with the appearance of coinage c.100 BC, different tribal groups slowly emerged into history. (Janet Sharpe)

### Forthcoming BAS meetings at RISC, 2.00 for 2.30 pm

**Saturday 19 February:** 'Lidar', a talk by Simon Crutchley (English Heritage)

**Saturday 20 March:** 'Romans in the Hambleton Valley', a talk by Jill Eyers (Chiltern Archaeology)

### Meetings at local archaeological societies

**South Oxfordshire Archaeological Group (SOAG):** meetings are held at Goring Heath Parish Hall (opposite the church at Whitchurch Hill) at 7.30 for 7.45 pm. There is a charge of £3.00 for non-members.

**Thursday 24 February:** 'The survival of the country house in the 20th century', by Malcolm Airs (Kellogg College, Oxford)

**Thursday 24 March:** '20th century conflict: archaeological and anthropological perspectives', by Nicholas Saunders (University of Bristol)

**Marlow Archaeological Society (MAS):** meetings are held at All Saints Church Hall, The Causeway, Marlow (near Marlow Bridge) at 8.00 pm. Members £2.50, non-members £3.50.

**Wednesday 9 March:** 'Glimmer in the dark – a celebration of art and craftsmanship in Anglo-Saxon England with later Viking influences, set against a backdrop of everyday life', by Martin Way (local historian)

### Adult Education: Summer Term 2011

For details, please see the following websites:

**WEA Reading Branch,** <http://southern.wea.org.uk> and select the Reading Branch  
**Oxford University courses in Reading and Oxford,** [www.conted.ox.ac.uk](http://www.conted.ox.ac.uk)

## BERKSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY



Patron: H.M. THE QUEEN  
President: Professor  
Michael Fulford 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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**For more information about the Society and membership details contact the Chairman: Andrew Hutt on 0118 973 2882.**

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# BERKSHIRE ARCHÆOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Patron: H.M. THE QUEEN  
President: Professor Michael Fulford FBA FSA

## RENEWAL OF MEMBERSHIP April 2011-March 2012

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