



ARCHAEOLOGY

The Newsletter of the Berkshire Archaeological Society

Autumn 2013

Vol.15, No.3

Running the Society

During the Spring and Summer there have been protracted discussions about the way the Society should be run and, in particular, the way we operate Spring Tours. As a charity we have a number of very strict legal requirements to fulfill and that responsibility lies with the trustees, who now are, as a result of the 2010 Charities Act, all the members of Council rather than a few specially designated persons. As a fall out from those discussions, our Chairman, Trevor Coombs felt it best to step down and his role is being filled by Andrew Hutt until the next AGM. Similarly David Lewis has resigned as Treasurer. At the same time Barrie Randall has felt that his health no longer allows him to run the Spring Tours as he used to, and this role is being taken over by Ronald Knowles.

We would like to express our thanks to those members of Council who are stepping down, either from a particular role or entirely, for all that they have done for the Society in the past.

We will be looking for some new blood at the next AGM and hope some of our younger members will step forward and take a more active part in the running of the Society. (John Chapman)

Annual General Meeting 2012

The AGM will take place on Saturday 21 September at RISC, London Street, Reading.

Refreshments will be served from 2.00 for a 2.30 pm start.

There are vacancies on the BAS Council for a new **Chairman and Secretary**: for more information, please contact the Secretary. All nominations for Council membership, proposed and seconded, must reach the Secretary (Andrew Hutt, 19 Challenor Close, Wokingham RG40 4UJ; andrew_hutt@talktalk.net) BEFORE 1 September. Nomination forms were circulated with the previous newsletter.

There are also vacancies for the posts of web-master, newsletter editor and archivist/librarian; to undertake the first post you need some skills with MS Word, the second requires some IT skills and for the third it is best if you have some space in your house for a library box or two so that you can review and enjoy the books in the book boxes.

The AGM will be followed by a talk by Katie Meheux entitled 'Saxons in the Thames Valley'.

Spring Tour 2014

The next Spring Tour will be to Kent and East Sussex on 9th to 12th May 2014 visiting Ightham Mote, Rochester Cathedral and Town Centre, Chatham Historic Dockyard, five castles, Canterbury, two abbeys and a heritage railway journey.

The application form to join this tour is attached.

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Spring Tour 2013 Report

This year's four day Spring Tour left Reading with 34 members, a new coach driver and a brand new luxury coach. Our first visit was to Stafford where Vinny Knowles led a walk around the historic town centre whilst Ron Knowles led a group of members for a visit to the motte and bailey Stafford Castle with its ruined 14th century keep. Our next visit was to the new Potteries Museum where we were treated to a fascinating talk about the Staffordshire Hoard followed by a good opportunity to examine the brilliant display of all the finds. Our hotel for the 3 nights was the Mercure Hotel at the Last Drop Village.



Day two started with a rather wet visit to the Fred Dibnah Heritage Centre where we were welcomed by some of the volunteers who are trying to preserve Fred's house, mine shaft, and workshops precariously perched above a steep slope to the river below. Off then to Bolton Town Centre where we all descended on the Olympus Restaurant to dry out, warm up and enjoy a

first class fish and chip lunch. Well fortified, we crossed the town for a Mayoral reception at the very imposing Town Hall and an amusing guided tour by the outgoing Mayor, ending an exhausting day with a guided tour of the half-timbered Hall I' th' Wood.

Next day began with a visit to the East Lancs Heritage Railway where we were welcomed with a cup of coffee in the trackside bar followed by a steam train ride to the end of the restored line at Rawtenstall. Off then to a guided tour of Rufford Old Hall built in 1530 and now in the guardianship of the National Trust. Our last visit of the day was to the British Commercial Vehicle Museum at Leyland where many of the former workers from the Leyland factory are working to preserve a representative collection of vehicles from a 'Pope Mobile' to highly polished fire engines and the very last vehicle off the production line with only 4 miles on the clock having only driven from the factory.

Our last day commenced with guided tours of historic Chester including a walk of the ancient city walls and to the remains of the Roman Amphitheatre. Our final visit was to an out-of-hours tour of the motte and bailey Tamworth Castle. Unfortunately, due to resurfacing of the steep approach footway, we had to wait for the workmen to clear their machinery which meant a very delayed start but we were reinforced for the journey with a very welcome cup of tea and generous slices of cake. Due to this delay we were late arriving back in Reading. Another enjoyable tour organised by Barrie and Annette Randall very ably assisted on the tour by Ron Knowles who is taking over from Barrie for next year's tour. (**Barrie Randall**)

Berkshire Building Recording Project

On 25th May 2013, eight BAS members attended the first training event run by the Berkshire Building Recording Project. The event was run by Andy Moir and focussed on recording timber-framed buildings. He first explained the architectural features which were incorporated in these buildings over time and then presented the building recording forms and on-line database that the project is going to use.

The third part of the event was a walk round the barn at Purley on Thames identifying and recording the architectural features. This proved to be a real eye opener. There was evidence of how the frames of the building were laid out in a field and first put together, overlaid with carpenters marks cut when the building was later taken down and moved for the first time and of new timbers included in the building when it moved for a second time to its current location.

Those who came along came away with a better understanding of timber-framed buildings and an enthusiasm to identify and record their local buildings.

The project is planning another training event later in the year, if you want to come along, please contact Barrie Randall, the project co-ordinator. (**Andrew Hutt**)

BAS summer walks and visits

Walk from Hackpen Hill to Segsbury Camp

On Saturday 8th June 2013, four of us joined Bob Brewer for a walk over Hackpen Hill. Bob told us about the surveys and excavations he undertaken on the hill. These have found a Bronze Age cross dyke which follows a geological fault line, and a series of anomalies in the geophysics which turned out to be natural vents, one of which had been used in the Bronze Age. We then walked with Bob towards Letcombe Bassett. On the way he showed us evidence of, what is probably, a partially constructed Iron Age hillfort and remains of some Bronze Age linear ditches. Bob left us at the top of the hill leading to Letcombe Bassett.

The path from Letcombe Bassett to Letcombe Regis ran along the edge of a ravine occupied by the Letcombe Brook which had been controlled using a variety of water works. In Letcombe Regis, in the pub, we met Trevor Coombs and Anne and Brian Griffin who were to accompany us over Segsbury Camp. After a drink we retired to the church yard to eat sandwiches; a delightful spot in the sun and out of the wind.

After lunch, at Segsbury Camp, Trevor, who had participated in the excavations, summarised details of the huts and other features which had been found. The day ended with a long walk back to Hackpen Hill and our cars.

All in all an enjoyable event with an opportunity to review some interesting archaeology and enjoy some wonderful scenery and thought provoking conversations. (**Andrew Hutt**)



Walk round Pangbourne

On 17th June there was a walk round Pangbourne led by Rosie Nurick. Unfortunately, I have not been able to persuade anybody who went on the walk to write an account. (**Editor**)

Visit to Silchester

Professor Mike Fulford greeted a sizable party of BAS members and others who had braved the earlier rain on 30 July to hear the latest news from the Silchester dig. This is the 17th and penultimate year of excavation in the north-east corner of Insula IX and the trench now displays features dating from c.50 BC-AD 50 and a great deal of gravel bedrock, apart from the Roman roads which have been left standing proud along its north and east edges. The main features include a substantial Iron Age ditch running diagonally across the site in a north-west to south-east direction which had silted up by c.20 BC, and the great hall which overlay it in the south-east corner of the trench. This large rectangular building was constructed c.20 BC. It is more than 27m long by 8m wide, and is believed to have been the hall of a high status Atrebatian chieftain: it is unique in Iron Age Britain. This building was probably in decay by c. AD 10-20 since it is overlain by early 1st century cultivation soil. A third feature is an Iron Age trackway heading to the north-west, not parallel to but converging with the line of the earlier ditch, and perhaps representing the reorganisation of the expanding Iron Age town.

The first sign of Roman interference was the establishment of a new road grid with the construction of the main north-south road running along the east side of Insula IX where it was built on top of pre-existing Iron Age buildings. It is still uncertain whether there was Roman military occupation at Silchester. Some military equipment has been found but, apart from a line of posts and a military-style latrine pit, no traces of military buildings have been found in Insula IX. The town was densely occupied in the mid-1st century, when the Iron Age lanes continued to be used alongside the Roman street grid and both round and rectangular buildings were constructed. A 'robust' timber house at right angles to the north-south road may have been built in the mid 40s by incomers, since it was surrounded by neonate burials, a Roman practice not found in the Iron Age.

A new trench has recently been opened in Insula III using the Victorian excavation as a window to explore the possible presence of high status buildings in this area. Most of the stone had been robbed and the Victorians left a poor plan. Their 'hypocaust' has now been reinterpreted as a post-Roman hearth, but a fragment of inscribed Purbeck marble and an ashlar of Bath stone may, just may, indicate the residence of the client king at Silchester. (**Janet Sharpe**)

Historic Eton

On a pleasant evening in July a group of BAS members met Dr David Lewis on Windsor Bridge for a walk along historic Eton High Street. Looking at David's map of Windsor and Eton in the 19th century, it was clear that Eton itself developed on an area of dry land bordered by the Thames and associated channels and ditches. Until recently Eton was situated in Buckinghamshire and the river formed the boundary with Berkshire, and before the present bridge (now pedestrian only) was built it was preceded by a number of wooden bridges, dating from 1170 on which tolls were levied. These would discourage people in Eton from crossing the Thames to the market in Windsor, and a separate market was set up just to the east of the present Eton High Street in c.1456, to serve the workers building Eton College. David showed us the site of the old market place, still discernible in the street plan but now infilled with newer buildings. Walking up the High Street we were also able to see evidence for town planning in the medieval burgage plots on each side of the road.

While Windsor developed into the prestigious royal borough it is today, Eton may have grown up originally to protect and maintain the road north from Windsor to Slough. Its standing increased once Henry VI chose the settlement as the site for his foundation of Eton College in 1440. The red brick college buildings at the north end of the High Street, and the associated halls and teaching rooms, now form an attractive entrance to the village from Slough. These building were some of the first to be built of brick in England, and are of exceptional historic and architectural importance.

Our thanks go to David for a most knowledgeable and entertaining evening.
(**Anne Harrison**)

From our library

One of the more interesting books that has been donated to our library is *The Writings of Roman Land Surveyors* (Campbell 2000). It contains texts by Roman authors in both Latin and English with associated commentaries.

A text entitled *the Book of Colonies* describes land assignments to communities throughout Italy. Some of the earliest assignments were recorded in lexes approved by Julius Caesar and Mark Antony.

A text attributed to Frontinus, who was governor in Britain AD 73/74 to AD 77/78, suggests that, during his time as governor, land was bring surveyed and delineated by markers and that he had to handle land disputes concerning land boundaries and ownership.

In the late 1st to early 2nd century AD, Balbus, a practicing surveyor, wrote a text in the form of a letter to one Celus, in which he described the processes of surveying linear features and measuring areas of land. In the 2nd to 3rd centuries AD, texts by Hyginus describe the practice of recording small areas of land such as villa estates. His approach is closely matched by extant land records for areas of the Berkshire Downs dating to the Saxon period.

These texts show how over time, land surveying changed from laying out military camps, roads and towns to laying out villa estates and measuring and recording their land areas, which, as described by Ulpian writing in c. AD 220, led directly to land taxes (Levick 1985: 89). (**Andrew Hutt**)

Campbell, B. 2000. *The Writings of Roman Land Surveyors*. London: The Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies.

Levick, B. 1985. *The Government of the Roman Empire: A Sourcebook*. London: Croom Helm

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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