



# ARCHAEOLOGY

The Newsletter of the Berkshire Archaeological Society

Summer 2019

Vol. 21, No.2

## Dates for your diary

**Saturday 29 June 2019** Visit to Excavations at Silchester, 2.00 p.m.

**13 to 28 July 2019** Ankerwycke geophysics and visitor experience, p. 5 below.

**Saturday 21 September 2019** AGM and Lecture. Main Hall, RISC, 14.00 to 16.00 p.m. Speaker to be confirmed.

**Friday 11 October 2019** Visit to Avebury. Details will be in the next Newsletter.

## From the Chair

I am writing this in the unseasonably cold days of early May while the clouds open and – admittedly – shower the garden with much-needed rain. So it is hard to report with great enthusiasm that the indoor learning opportunities of the Society – the lectures, finds sorting, Day School, and study group – are giving way to the outdoor practical learning opportunities of site-visits, excavation, and geophysical surveys, but they are and the cold and rain won't last forever. Most of these activities are reported on in this Newsletter.

Meanwhile the conclusions from the 'Way Forward Days', where members got together to discuss how to achieve a mixture of shorter-term goals and longer-term dreams for the Society, are percolating through. In the latter category falls the much-loved and -missed BAS Tour. The Committee is working assiduously to resurrect this activity through the out-sourcing of the more onerous logistic arrangements. Any members who are interested in helping out with the remaining practicalities please feel free to pipe up now! A lot of discussion centred on the more general social side of the Society, e.g. there are now regular lunches as well as a maintained interest in outreach and partnerships, BAS is hosting a 'Big Tent' at the East Reading Festival in cooperation with various organisations including Reading Museum and Thames Valley Archaeological Services. In addition, the objectives and needs of a learned society, e.g. the production and aims of the journal, were also rationalised during these 'Days'.

During my first six months of being Chair I have become aware of how much energy and dedication the Committee members bring to BAS so this is a huge thank you to them all on behalf of us all. I also owe much gratitude to the out-going Chair, Ann Griffin, who has wisely counselled me and always 'had time' if there is a frantic phone-call between Reading and Somerset.

*Alison Mcquitty*

## Events and Visits

### East Reading Festival

In a new approach to interacting with the community, BAS will be participating in the East Reading Festival (<http://www.eastreadingfestival.co.uk/>), and would like some help from members to look after the stall on the day. We will be coordinating a 'Big Tent' at the Festival which takes place on 23 June, 12–18 p.m. in Palmer Park. This stall is all about raising awareness of, and enthusiasm for, archaeology and heritage and will involve several other organisations that protect, investigate, and curate archaeology and heritage in the county. If you can spare an hour or more on the day to help please contact John Sharpe on [info@berksarch.co.uk](mailto:info@berksarch.co.uk). Please specify your contact details and an approximate time when you can help.

### BAS visit to Silchester

There is a visit to the University of Reading's ongoing excavations at the Roman Bath House in Silchester, with a guided tour by Professor Mike Fulford, on Saturday 29 June. Please meet at 2.00 p.m. in the public car park. There will be a donation box available – please be generous. There may be teas available in the nearby church. Booking is not essential but if you would like to go please let Anne Harrison know so we have an idea of numbers. Please note the walk to the trenches is rough and over uneven ground.

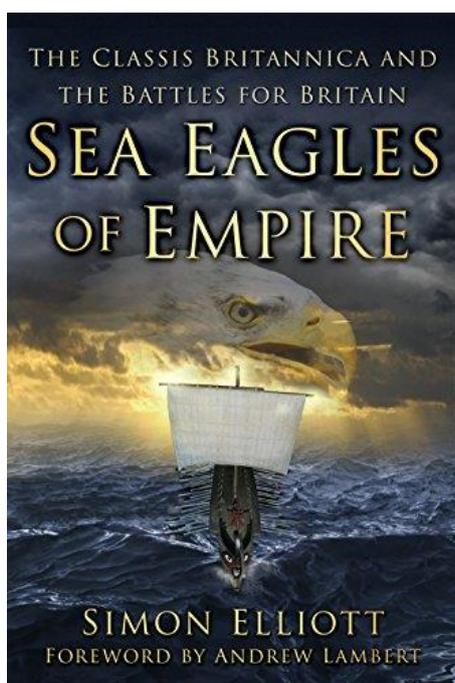
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BERKSHIRE

## Archaeology on Saturdays

### Sea Eagles of Empire: the *classis britannica* and the battles for Britain

A talk by Simon Elliott, 16 March 2019

The *classis britannica* or British fleet was one of ten post-Augustan regional fleets in existence by the end of the 1st century AD. The ships were originally built by order of the emperor Caligula in AD 40 for his abortive plan to invade Britain. These same ships were later successfully used by Claudius in AD 43. The first specific mention of the fleet was made by Tacitus when it was sent to quell the Batavian revolt on the Rhine in AD 69–70, a successful action that was followed by ignominy as the battle moved inland and no one was left to guard the ships – which were burnt. The rebuilt fleet comprised 900 ships and 7,000 men under the command of a prefect, an officer of equestrian rank, who was appointed by the emperor and who was the third most important person in the running of the Roman province of Britain.



Of the ten fleets, the British fleet ranked joint third with the German fleet. The latter simply patrolled the Rhine, whereas the British fleet was responsible for the British and continental coasts as far as the Rhine delta and also the principal British river systems. It maintained a vital role in maintaining the Channel crossing. It controlled the open ocean seaways and the coastal littoral, functioning as a military transport resource and facilitating amphibious assaults. It was used for general supply purposes and for patrolling and policing the North Sea. In addition, it performed civilian roles in administration, engineering, and construction. It controlled iron production, ragstone quarrying, and tile-making in the Weald, which became the industrial heartland of Roman Britain. Major sites included the iron-working centre at Beauport Park near Hastings, where huge piles of slag

were utilised for road-building in the 19th century and yielded tiles stamped with the name of the fleet. Kentish ragstone was transported from five quarries via the Medway and Thames to London, and the ships returned laden with imported goods from the Continent.



Double banked Roman galleys on Trajan's column

The headquarters of the British fleet was at Boulogne, where the eastern Channel was seen as a connection rather than a barrier. Forts were established in the south-east at Dover, Lympne, Pevensey, Richborough, and elsewhere on the east coast. On the west coast forts were built at Caerleon (where the Roman harbour has recently been excavated), Chester, and Bowness. The fighting ships were galleys such as the Liburnian bireme, which could hold a crew of 100, and monoreme cutters and skiffs. In addition, transport vessels of all types were built, often in the Romano-Celtic clinker-built tradition, but also Mediterranean-type plank-built ships. A rare graffito on a discarded lead ingot found near Brancaster shows a detailed sketch of a plank-built ship which must have been drawn by someone with first-hand experience. The crews comprised legionaries and auxiliaries and naval *milites*. Naval personnel were paid as auxiliaries and had to serve a minimum of 28 years. They were organised in the same way as the military on land. The fleet was essentially coastal and ventured out only during the day, returning to shore at night where the crews shared camps with the regular army.

Four legions took part in the AD 43 invasion, comprising 40,000 troops who were landed on the east Kent coast in three waves by 900 ships. A battle was fought at the Medway and another at the Thames, where the fleet made a bridge of boats across the river. During subsequent campaigns, the navy played a key role on both east and west coasts by scouting and controlling supplies. After the Roman victory at Mons Graupius in highland Scotland in the early AD 80s, the fleet was commanded to circumnavigate Britain in order to lay claim to the entire island. In the 2nd century the fleet supported the army in the north and Benwell fort on Hadrian's Wall was built by a vexillation (regiment) of sailors. Septimius Severus ordered further gruelling campaigns in northern Britain in the early 3rd century which were also supported by the fleet. The *classis britannica* was last documented

in AD 249 by Saturninus, its then North African commander. The main cause of its disappearance was probably the economic crisis which took place in the mid-3rd century, compounded by multiple usurpations, invasions from the north, Persians in the east, civil war, and plague. It may have become too expensive to

maintain – or it may have supported the wrong group. The fleet was replaced by the Saxon Shore forts but coastal peace around Britain was essentially lost.

Janet Sharpe

## Day School 2019

After an introduction and welcome by Alison McQuitty (Chair), the first sessions followed, with presentations by Sarah Orr, the West Berkshire Senior Archaeologist based at Newbury, and Fiona McDonald, the East Berkshire Archaeological Officer based in Reading. The roles of both centre on the development and maintenance of Historic Environment Records for their respective areas, assessing the impact of planning applications for building and quarrying on the archaeological heritage, conservation and outreach. Both drew attention to *A Guide to Historic Environment Records (HERs) in England*, published by Historic England in February 2019. Sarah also mentioned Historic England's *Neighbourhood Planning and the Historic Environment* (2018). Fiona referred to the Old Windsor project in which several BAS members were involved.

John Powell (Wessex Archaeology) followed after coffee with a description of two gravel quarries. **Richings Park quarry** near Langley covers 38ha and the site represents a 'staircase' of Thames Valley terraces, formed as the river migrated south during the Ice Age. Early gravel pits in the area had produced a number of Palaeolithic worked flints dating back 260,000 years. Bore holes and test pits were used to create a model of the underlying gravel deposits but only 17 worked flints, most of which had been redeposited, were recovered from the strip trenches. To compensate, the site also yielded Neolithic pits, a Bronze Age field system, an Iron Age burial, late Iron Age/early Roman storage pits, and a Roman well. The **Riding Court Farm quarry** near Datchet is larger at 43ha. Early Neolithic activity predominated here, with pits, rectangular houses, a cursus, and a causewayed enclosure. The enclosure ditches yielded many finds; animal bones, pottery, and worked flints, including axes from Cornwall and Cumbria. Human remains included skulls and complete inhumations. Unusually, the causewayed enclosure contained a ditched oval feature in the centre with more finds in the ditches, including an antler comb and an almost complete vessel, and a rectangular post-built structure.

Mike Fulford (University of Reading) then provided an update on the **Roman baths at Silchester** [see the BAS visit report in the Autumn 2018 Newsletter]. The baths lie in the south-east corner of the town where permanent springs provided a regular supply of water that was lifted and stored before feeding the baths. The first Nero-stamped tile was found when the baths were first exposed in 1903–4. There is evidence for the continual raising of

levels to counteract flooding. The current project aims to date the building, determine the role of Nero in the development of the early Roman town, and determine how the baths were used by examining finds within and immediately outside the building. The 2018 season exposed the entrance, the east wall, and the *tepidarium*. The baths were aligned to the Iron Age street plan and remained askew to the later Roman street grid. The facade was built of Wealden greensand blocks with brick courses but the eastern half was later remodelled to accommodate a large latrine block. Excavations at the baths will continue between 17 June and 13 July 2019 with an open day on Saturday 6 July.



Excavations at Silchester Baths

Tom Dommert (National Trust) next set out plans to revamp and reinterpret the site of **Runnymede and Ankerwycke** which straddles the Thames. Best known for the signing of Magna Carta, one of the project's aims is to discover if there actually was a 'Magna Carta island', the present one being an artificial construction. The National Trust has instigated a three-year community archaeology project scheduled to start in 2020. The site has huge archaeological potential: a Late Bronze Age wharf was discovered in the 1980s. At Ankerwycke on the north bank a moated site represents the remains of a priory founded in the 12th century [where BAS is planning to undertake fieldwork in July – see Fieldwork below]. The site is famous as home to perhaps the oldest yew tree in Britain, estimated to be some 2,500 years old.

After lunch, Paul Booth (recently retired from Oxford Archaeology) gave us an update on **Dorchester-on-Thames** and the completion of annual excavations in the town's allotments as part of the Discovering Dorchester project (2007–2018). Sheppard Frere's excavations in the allotments in the 1960s had revealed part of a possible

Roman fort and this was finally confirmed at the end of the 2018 season when linear postholes and traces of timber buildings of a military character were uncovered beneath the axial Roman road. When superimposed on Frere's findings, these were seen to form part of the same building complex. Frere dated the fort to c. AD 60–80 on coin evidence, but the 715 coins found during the current excavations included five copies of Claudian asses, two Republican denarii, and four Flavian coins, and Paul considers that the fort is possibly earlier than Frere thought. Little was revealed of the mid-Roman sequence. Some large pits, dug originally for brick earth and gravel, later became rubbish pits. Some small fragments of cob walling were found but the only substantial structure was a 2nd century building at the west end of the trench, which was cut through by a ditch in the late Roman period. Large quantities of 'Period 21' coins dating to AD 388–402 were recovered, and these comprise more than 30% of all the Roman coins found at Dorchester. Some late Roman, possibly military-style, buckles relate to the same period. Another elaborate buckle discovered with a burial on top of the inner bank of the Dyke Hills in 2010 has been dated to the first quarter of the 5th century and possibly later. The buckles indicate the presence of a small military corps in and around Dorchester in the early 5th century. Whether this should be considered late Roman or early Saxon is yet to be resolved.

The **Romano-British tile and pottery industry at Little London**, located 3km south-south-west of Silchester, was described by Sara Machin (University of Reading). In 1925, amateur archaeologist Lt Col. J. B. P. Karlake described the field as 'orange' with brick and tile fragments, and excavated to find a Nero-stamped tile but no kilns. Two trenches were opened in 2017 following a magnetometry survey. The first revealed linear ditches on either side of a trackway and a large brick-built kiln measuring 5 x 7 m.



*Kiln at Little London and Nero tiles*

Surrounding postholes may represent a wooden building where tiles were dried before firing. The second trench showed a V-cut ditch full of wasters, over half of which were flagon handles together with early bowls, flagons and jars, and three kilns packed with pottery. More than 4.5 tonnes of CBM were recovered, including hypocaust *pilae*, flue tiles with scored, combed, or relief patterning,

hollow voussoirs for archways, antefixes, curved bricks probably used to span small openings, and circular column bricks. Two of the *tegulae* had round holes with raised edges, described as 'sky-lights' which are very rare in Britain; one was found *in situ* at Pompeii where it may have let light in or smoke out. *Tegulae colliciarum* were cut diagonally across to fit into a roof valley where two slopes met. Three more fragments of Nero-stamped tiles were found; 16 of these have been recorded from Silchester so far.

Alan Hall (site director) stepped in at short notice with an update on the **Romano-British site at High Wood**, near Henley. This enigmatic site comprises a large (50 x 40 m) 4th century enclosure and building complex of uncertain function, overlying Late Iron Age and early Roman material. A separate mound appears to represent the spoil heap of an early 'antiquarian' dig and contains higher status material hinting at a possible villa in the vicinity. Alan spoke about the High Wood project at the BAS December 2018 meeting.

The final talk was presented by Stephanie Duensing (John Moore Heritage Services) and Ceri Boston (freelance osteologist) on findings in **St Mary's churchyard, Wargrave**. Excavations on the north side of the church uncovered 89 articulated skeletons and assorted charnel. Until the late 18th century, the north side of the church was considered to be 'the Devil's quarter' and most people chose to be buried on the south side. The skeletons recovered therefore did not represent the 'top brass' of Wargrave society. The church maintains a continuous record of christenings, marriages, and burials from 1538 to the present and it was possible to correlate years with a higher than normal rate of burials with poor harvests. A high rate of burials in 1642–44 coincided with the English Civil War when armies lived off the land and local people not only went short but were exposed to disease epidemics. No infants or young children were represented in the bone sample. Bone injuries reflected occupations associated with farming, rural crafts, and the river trade. A certain type of hand fracture is associated with rowing; ankle bone fractures could be related to the use of treadles on spinning wheels; spinal problems indicated that children were subjected to heavy labour from a very young age. Syphilis was confirmed in one individual with several other suspected cases. There were two cases of TB; 12 cases of chronic lung disease (thickening of the ribs), and six cases of chronic sinusitis, probably the result of living or working indoors in a smoky environment. It was concluded that the 89 skeletons were representative of a working class population and an agrarian economy, together with specific fractures associated with the river trade; both men and women worked for their living.

Thanks are due to the organisers and participants who made the day such a great success, and especially to Trevor Coombs who planned it all.

*Janet Sharpe*

## Field Work

### Blounts Court

After Easter, for two weeks, a team from BAS worked at Blounts Court. Their objective was to find the north-east corner of the barn dating to the 16th and 17th centuries and the end of the Georgian garden wall. The team dug two trenches which were eventually combined to give us one large trench. This work revealed that the Georgian wall terminated in a brick pillar, which formed part of a



Figure 1. The North east end of the Georgian wall, with the brick pillar

gateway (Figure 1). It also revealed a large mortared flint wall leading towards the corner of the Blounts Court house.



Figure 2. The mortared flint wall from the south showing its brick pillar. The line of cut flints are above the ranging pole alongside the split

The north-east end of this wall had the base of a brick pillar (Figure 2), the other side of the gateway mentioned above. This wall had been split by subsidence (see the line running across the feature).

To the left of the split were 3 courses of cut flints. Our next excavation at Blounts Court will investigate this wall.

### Ankerwycke Priory geophysics survey

Ankerwycke Priory lies on the eastern bank of the River Thames opposite Runnymede on a site which is owned by the National Trust. You can visit the site by driving to the car park in Magna Carta Lane, Wraysbury and following the signs.



Ankerwycke Priory

Ankerwycke Priory was a Benedictine nunnery founded around AD 1160. Originally a wooden structure this was replaced by buildings constructed of chalk blocks. The buildings were not extensive as there were never more than 10 nuns housed there. In the surrounding area there were two fishponds, watercourses and ditches, a building platform, and a probable water feature. Excavations around the remains exposed chalk walls and tile floors *in situ* and medieval and post medieval pottery. The Ankerwycke Yew stands to the north of the ruins and may be 2000 years old.

From 13 to 28 July 2019, the Society is partnering the National Trust to carry out a geophysics survey of three fields around the Priory. Further to this, as part of the Festival of Archaeology, we are planning a Visitors Experience with a gazebo and explanation boards.

We need BAS members to help with either or both of these activities, so if you have a few free days in July please volunteer and contact either Andrew Hutt or Anne Harrison. Dates are:

Friday 12 July 2019 surveying in grid and start  
Saturday 13 July 2019 and Sunday 14 July 2019  
Tuesday 16 July 2019 to Sunday 21 July 2019 inclusive  
Tuesday 23 July 2019 to Sunday 28 July 2019 inclusive

The working day on site is likely to be:  
10.00 meet in the Magna Carta carpark with all the equipment to go on site, establish the Visitor experience  
11.00 Visitor experience open, geophysics work starts  
Lunch  
15:00 Visitor experience closes, geophysics work stops  
16:00 Visitor experience taken off site, leave the site.

Andrew Hutt

## The Study Group

April 2019

### Iron working in Iron Age and Roman Berkshire

A small group met at Brocks Keep on 10 April to hear a presentation based on papers which are to appear in the forthcoming issue of the Berkshire Archaeological Journal. The presentation started by revisiting the Solent Thames Research Framework and Iron Age and Roman iron working techniques and technology. This was followed by a review of Iron Age sites at Hartshill Copse and Dunstan Park near Thatcham; Fleet Hill Farm, Finchampstead; Amen Corner, Bracknell; Riseley Farm, Swallowfield; Whitehall Brick and Tile works, Arborfield; sites round Lightwater and Bagshot; and Castlevie Road, Slough. This led to a review of Roman iron working on some of the above sites, at Silchester, and on villa sites around Berkshire.

*Andrew Hutt*

## Archaeology in and around Berkshire

### Friends of Reading Abbey Annual Outing, to Cholsey, Wallingford and Dorchester-On-Thames

Members are invited by Friends of Reading Abbey to join them on their outing to Cholsey, Wallingford, and Dorchester-On-Thames, on Wednesday 24 July. The outing will include, among others, visiting the burial place of Agatha Christie, the Saxon defences of Wallingford, and Dorchester Abbey. The cost is £35 by coach, £20 by car. For more details and to book contact John Painter: [j.g.painter@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:j.g.painter@hotmail.co.uk).

### 2019 CBA Festival of Archaeology

The 2019 CBA Festival of Archaeology will be held from 13–28 July across the UK. A number of events have been organised locally, including at Oxford; The Ashmolean Museum; West Berkshire Museum, Newbury; Reading Museum; also see the Visitor Experience at Ankerwycke and events at East Reading Festival, which are part of the Festival of Archaeology. Reading Museum has a Roman Fun Day on the 25 July, 10.00 a.m. to 3.00 p.m., with activities and crafts, meet one of the Romano-British citizens living at Calleva Atrebatum (Silchester), find out about their life 2000 years ago and have a go at dressing up. Also talk to volunteers and staff and find out about the plans to update the Silchester Gallery. Drop in to make pasta jewellery brooches and laurel leaf headdresses, handle some real and replica objects from our famous Loans Collection and then write your name in Latin. For information about the Festival of Archaeology see: [festival.archaeologyuk.org](http://festival.archaeologyuk.org).

## Talks by other groups

**Archaeology in Marlow (AiM)**, Liston Hall, Marlow, SL7 1DD. Members of AiM & MAS £3.00, non-members £4.50.

Thursday 20 June **Celebrating 75 years of the CBA – a look at the CBA's past, present and future**, by Sue Dormer, Trustee for the Council for British Archaeology (CBA).

## Input to the newsletter

If you have an archaeological story that you feel would interest the Society, please send it to Gail Eaton by the end of August 2019 at: [newsletter@berksarch.co.uk](mailto:newsletter@berksarch.co.uk)

## 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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