



ARCHAEOLOGY

The Newsletter of the Berkshire Archaeological Society

Winter 2023

Vol. 25, No.4

Dates for your diary

Venues - Unless advised otherwise:

BAS Finds Group (in person only) and BAS Study Group (in person and on Zoom) - Woosehill Community Centre, Woosehill Court, Emmview Close, Wokingham, RG41 3DA.

BAS Lunches - The Wheelwright's Arms, Davis Way, Hurst, Reading, RG10 0TR. If you want to come to the lunch, please notify Keith Abbott by the Saturday before the lunch.

Saturday lectures - RISC, London St, Reading, RG1 4PS with refreshments from 2pm. Lectures start at 2:30pm and are live streamed on Zoom. Non-members are welcome to attend lectures. If wishing to attend on Zoom, they need to email [lectures\(at\)berksarch.co.uk](mailto:lectures(at)berksarch.co.uk) by the end of the Wednesday before the lecture.

All meeting Zoom links are emailed in advance and the Zoom session opens 10-15 minutes before the meeting.

Tuesday 5th December 2023: BAS Finds Group 7:30pm

Wednesday 6th December 2023: BAS Study Group: 2:30pm

Saturday 9th December 2023: Lecture: *How to build a castle: a major experimental archaeology project at Guédelon, France* by Tim Lloyd, BAS member

Tuesday 2nd January 2024: BAS Finds Group: 7:30pm

Wednesday 3rd January 2024: BAS Study Group: 2:30pm

Wednesday 10th January 2024: BAS Lunch: 12 noon

Saturday 20th January 2024: Lecture: *'Who we are and where do we come from?'* by Francis Taylor, CBA Wessex

Tuesday 6th February 2024: BAS Finds Group 7:30pm

Wednesday 7th February 2024: BAS Study Group: 2:30pm

Wednesday 14th February 2024: BAS Lunch: 12 noon

Saturday 17th February 2024: Lecture: *The Silchester Environs Project* by Professor Michael Fulford, University of Reading

Tuesday 5th March 2024: BAS Finds Group 7:30pm

Wednesday 6th March 2024: BAS Study Group: 2:30pm

Wednesday 13th March 2024: BAS Lunch: 12 noon

Saturday 16th March 2024: Lecture: *'Iron-ing it out, nail-ing it down: A new multi-period methodology and typology for recording structural iron nails'* by Katie Manby, Doctoral Candidate, University of Reading

Wednesday 10th April 2024: BAS Lunch: 12 noon

Saturday 13th April 2024: BAS Day School: St Nicolas' Church Hall, Newbury, RG14 5HG, 10.00am to 5.00pm

Tuesday 30th April 2024: BAS Finds Group 7:30pm

Wednesday 1st May 2024: BAS Study Group: 2:30pm

Compiled by Julie Worsfold

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BERKSHIRE

Do you take notes at meetings?

This might sound like a really strange question. We all enjoy reading the reviews of the Society's lectures, Day Schools and visits either in the newsletter or online, especially when we have not been able to attend them. These reviews are written by a small group of members of the Society. Sadly, one of these members is moving away. Consequently, the Society is now looking for more members who are willing to take notes during lectures, Day Schools and visits and write them up into a review to be published through the usual channels.

If you are interested in contributing to the Society in this way, please contact me via newsletter@berksarch.co.uk.

The more members this group has the less frequently you will be requested to do this!

Thank you,

Julie Worsfold

From the Chair

At the recent Annual General meeting, we briefly celebrated the wide range of activities undertaken by the Society in the financial year April 2022 to March 2023.

Catherine Petts

This AGM also signalled the retirement of Catherine Petts from being one of our Trustees. Catherine has served the Society over many years:

- From 2001 to 2006, she was chair of the Society. She took over after the death of Cecil Slade
- In 2006 and 2007 she was secretary of the Society
- From 2008 to 2012 she was treasurer of the Society

Alongside these front-line positions, Catherine edited the Berkshire Archaeological Journal. She was deputy editor of volume 75 published in 1997, edited volumes 76 and 77 and thereafter was joint editor with Andrew Hutt for volumes 78 to 84.

Catherine has helped lay the foundations of the Society we have today. We owe her a debt of gratitude and many thanks for her work.

Learning archaeology

In the last newsletter, I outlined the work the Council is doing to clarify the archaeological training the Society is offering you. This work is progressing and, in the coming months, is expected to result in a BAS archaeology learning policy. This should offer you more opportunities to learn about archaeology and how to work as an archaeologist.

Integrated Archaeological Database

Since the last newsletter was published in August many BAS members have been involved in recording excavations in the Integrated Archaeological Database (IADB). This included:

- Recording the contexts for the Old Windsor excavations
- Recording the phases of use and revising the finds records for the Blounts Court excavations
- Recording the contexts for the Cookham excavations

The system we are using for this is IADB 2017, which is likely to be retired in two years' time. Given that the Society needs a system with IADB's capabilities, a working group has been established to find a way forward. The working group is assessing both available third-party IT applications and the possibility of developing a system which we can use ourselves and offer to third parties. If you would like to contribute to this effort, please contact me.

Andrew Hutt

BAS AGM Report

The Society's AGM was held on Saturday 18th November 2023 with more than 35 members meeting both in-person at RISC and virtually on Zoom. The meeting papers had been circulated for members to read beforehand, and the Chair's report and Treasurer's report were presented by Andrew Hutt and Anne Harrison respectively. Both were unanimously accepted along with the minutes of the 2022 AGM.

Our Chair, Andrew Hutt, gave a short summary of the successes and key activities of the Society over the past 12 months which included increased membership, monthly newsletters, stimulating lectures, regular pub lunches, a day school, an active study group and an active programme of fieldwork across the county.

The election of officers and trustees for the coming year unanimously returned Andrew Hutt as Chair, Anne Harrison as Treasurer, Keith Abbott as Secretary, and Ann Griffin, Tim Lloyd, Jean Curran, Paul Seddon, James Peddle, and Griselda Truscott Wicks as trustees. Thanks were offered to John Butler for his independent auditing of the Society's accounts, and he was elected to continue in this capacity for the coming year.

The AGM was followed by a fascinating talk by *Professor Hella Eckardt* on the assemblage of Roman material discovered at Piercebridge, which was thoroughly enjoyed by all.

Keith Abbott

Archaeology on Saturdays

West Berks Historic Environment Records and the Lost Gardens of Shaw House, a talk by Beth Asbury, West Berkshire Council, on Saturday 16th September 2023

West Berkshire Council (WBC) has curatorial responsibility for archaeology in the local environment. Consequently, its Archaeology Team researches the sites of planning applications in its Historic Environment Records (HER) which holds information on all known surviving physical remains of human activity. Surprisingly, local authorities are not required to have an HER, but the Levelling-Up and Regeneration Bill (LURB) proposes making them compulsory. The HER database is linked to a Geographic Information System (GIS) which accurately records where designated heritage assets such as scheduled monuments, listed buildings, registered parks and gardens, registered battlefields and protected wreck sites are to be found. The WBC HER contains one registered battlefield, 1,929 listed buildings, and 94 scheduled monuments including the standing remains of Donnington Castle, although this is the only English Heritage managed property in Berkshire.

Shaw House was built in 1581 by a wealthy cloth merchant and is now a Grade 1 listed building. The listed buildings within its park include; the Grade 2 listed 1908 Gateway which probably replaced the Ha-ha which was filled in; the Grade 2 listed 1841 St Mary's Church, formerly the site of an Anglo-Saxon Norman church with a Norman font and which may have been important in the Roman period as Roman tiles are said to have been in the roof of the previous building; the Grade 2 listed lychgate ('Lych' - Anglo-Saxon word meaning, dead body); four Grade 2 listed tombs in the churchyard mainly dating to the early 19th century.

Shaw Park is Grade 2 listed. The route to the house from the Bath Road is long and tree lined. In 1733 the Duke of Chandos joined the river Lambourn to the canal giving rise to a cascade and a semi-circular pool which reflected the house. Remnants of a platform to view this are believed to remain. The water features silted up in the early 20th century. In the 1960s they were filled in as part

of the construction of the A339. The drive is still partly lined with trees but now bisected by this road.

Shaw House became a school during World War II and was used as such for decades until a new school opened in 1999 in the Deer Park.

Historic England decides which buildings to designate. There are 53 designated areas in West Berkshire. The grounds of Shaw House now have several different owners and are therefore on the 'at risk' list.

The first battle of Newbury took place on the 20th of September 1643. The outcome was a stalemate, and its site is now a registered battlefield.

The Battlefield Trust wants to list the site of the second battle of Newbury which took place in 1644. However, it needs the agreement of all concerned to do this. For this battle the royalist army made its headquarters at Shaw House. It is possible that the chalk terrace (parterre) of Shaw House was used in this second battle. The royalist army made some gains before nightfall but was in a weak position and removed to Oxford overnight.

Most heritage assets are not nationally or locally designated which means that they have no legal protection.

The Kennet Valley is an important Mesolithic site. The discovery of the oldest decoratively carved piece of wood at Boxford in the Lambourn Valley four years ago indicates that Mesolithic occupation could extend there too.

From 1957-61 John Wymer, then curator at Reading Museum, excavated the Thatcham Reedbeds which in the Mesolithic period had been a lake, popular on a seasonal basis. Nowadays there is a trail around the site. Finds, including a human arm bone, are on the top floor of Reading Museum and in West Berkshire Museum. Thatcham is the strongest claimant to be the oldest continuously inhabited settlement in Britain.

Hartshill Copse to the north-east of Thatcham was occupied in the Bronze Age as evidenced by round houses and pottery. But it was the evidence of ironwork there which brought the start date of the Iron Age in Britain forwards by 200-300 years.

The Heritage Gateway website, www.heritagegateway.org.uk is the portal to most HERs across the country.

WBC has an online map, with sites linked to its respective HER records. There is an online reporting form for enquiries about WBC HER records, and another for WBC heritage information and issues. Alternatively, contact the archaeology team at WBC.

Information on the local heritage trails at Kintbury, Inkpen, Hungerford, Pangbourne, WWII Newbury, and the Shaw House and St Mary's church conservation area is available at: www.westberkshireheritage.org/local-heritage/heritage-walks.

Julie Worsfold

Kinship and Early Neolithic chambered tombs in Britain' a talk by Professor Chris Fowler on Saturday 14th October 2023.

Professor Chris Fowler started his talk by telling us of the hundreds of surviving tombs from Early Neolithic Britain and Ireland (c.4000 to 3400 BC). These Early Neolithic tombs are very varied, with a simple architectural structure of a rectangular chamber cell, which was combined in different ways.

While recent research has looked at the positioning of tombs in the landscape, of what and how they were built, and the condition of the human remains found within them, Chris is interested in what these structures can tell us about kinship in the Early Neolithic.

Using ancient DNA (aDNA) analysis, the interred at Hazleton North, a Neolithic chambered long cairn, were studied. Chris wanted to find out if the architecture of the tomb, the two different chambers, were related to the kinship of the people deposited there.

Previous isotope analyses on the interred at Hazleton North have been interpreted as the deceased eating a similar diet. Other isotope studies indicated mobility across the land to about 40km to the south, with some individuals having spent their early years about 20km to the west. The people were defined as having a "pattern of residential, tethered mobility."

Hazleton North has two burial chambers; the North chamber and the South chamber, positioned opposite each other at about the midpoint of the long cairn. While the South chamber remained open during the period of deposition, in the North chamber, the passage had collapsed sometime after deposits had been made in the

inner chamber, with deposits then made in the North Entrance.

Differences in mortuary practice were seen between the two chambers. Thus, in the North chamber, some bones had been gnawed by canids (dogs, wolves, etc.), some showed signs of weathering, and other bones had been cremated.

The osteological MNI (minimum number of individuals), from the site was 41, and included 22 adults, 2 juveniles, 10 children and 7 infants. The total number of genetic individuals found was 35, with 26 being male and 9 being female. Of the subadults, 9 were male and 2 were female. 27 individuals were close biological relatives, spanning five generations.

From Hazleton North chambered cairn "the world's oldest family tree" has been constructed, with aDNA samples showing how five generations of the same family were interred there. We looked at diagrams displaying the data from the 35 genetic individuals found, which showed how gender, life stage and kinship were connected at the tomb.

On a diagram entitled "Patrilineal descent", we could see there were 14 direct father-to-son connections between the generations. There was no matrilineal descent; no cases where mother and daughter were both present.

Chris explained the coding system. Thus, NC1m was a male found in the North [inner] Chamber, numbered 1 because he was first in the family tree. U4f was an Unsampled female lower down in the tree. Her existence can be inferred from her descendant, but her remains have not been found in the tomb.

A diagram entitled "Founding female ancestors (all with grandchildren in the tomb)", was absolutely fascinating! Given the male bias, it was interesting to see that four females, all mates of NC1m, who was at the head of the family tree, were all first- or second-generation women with sons and grandsons in the tomb. The women appeared to have special status as lineage founders, giving three of them a place in the tomb, which other women, such as the mates of their sons and grandsons, did not get.

One of the founding female ancestors, U3f, was not found in the tomb; she may have died and been interred elsewhere before Hazleton North chambered cairn was thought of, and then built. Only lineage females who died in childhood were buried here, suggesting that adult lineage females were interred elsewhere, or given different mortuary rites.

Looking at a diagram entitled "Growing the lineage: founding mothers' sons (with non-lineage biological fathers)," it was fascinating to see that there were three males in the tomb whose biological fathers were not present, but whose mothers had reproduced with a lineage male. We cannot know if the three males'

biological paternity was known at the time, but they were interred in the tomb, implying that they were incorporated into the lineage.

A diagram entitled “Deposition patterns suggest sub-lineages based on (paternal) descent from first generation women,” showed how the different sub-lineages were deposited in the two chambers. Thus, descendants of founding females NC2f and NC3f were usually deposited in the North chamber, while descendants of the other two founding females; SC1f and U3f, were deposited in the South chamber.

Non-lineage individuals were deposited in all parts of the tomb. It was thought the women may have been the mates of lineage males who had no children deposited in the tomb. Or, they may all have been ‘adoptive’ kin, or included for other reasons. Thus, an articulated male skeleton, buried with flint knapping accoutrements, was that of a non-lineage individual, but he apparently merited a place in the tomb.

Hazleton North chambered cairn appears to have been built slowly over five to ten years, possibly as the lineage grew in generation 2. None of the deposited were generation 1 children, suggesting any who died young were interred elsewhere before the tomb was built.

Genetic analysis shows that reproducing with multiple partners was common amongst the first two generations, where both men and women had multiple mates, which led to a rapid expansion of the lineage. However, this practice decreased over time, and the lineage later declined. Unlike other tombs in the Cotswold-Severn area, Hazleton North was not modified, and was later abandoned.

Chris described other Cotswold-Severn tombs, such as Ascott-under-Wychwood, very similar structurally to Hazleton North, and also used over five consecutive generations. Other Cotswold-Severn tombs show different chamber arrangements, and some were modified over time. We looked at the architecture of transepted tombs, such as Wayland's Smithy II, but which have, as yet, no aDNA studies to compare with those of Hazleton North.

Early Neolithic tomb architecture, combined with osteological and genetic analyses, can reveal fascinating information about Neolithic kinship. It would be most interesting to see if the kinship patterns seen at Hazleton North, such as patrilineal descent, including that by possibly ‘adopted’ males, and the honouring of ‘founding females’ with a place in the tomb, are repeated elsewhere.

Joan Burrow-Newton

Bridge Over Troubled Water: Roman Finds From Rivers At Piercebridge And Beyond, a talk by Professor Hella Eckardt, University of Reading, on Saturday 18th November 2023.

Approaches to river deposits

In the past it was accepted, archaeologically, that the above along with deposits in wells, springs and fords were placed there ritually. But in continental Europe the view has been different, for example the sinking of the Germanic raiders’ boat at Xanten on the Rhine. There may also have been accidental losses. On Trajan’s column in Rome there is a depiction of a soldier carrying his kit on his head across a bridge. River deposits may also be the result of a change in the river course, e.g. the Thames at London, where the mudlarks are now finding settlement deposits. Rivers may also be convenient dumping grounds such as in Roman Lincoln and indeed the Tiber in Rome itself as shown in an 18th-century Piranesi print.

In the past rivers were powerful entities. The Danube, for example, was fearsome. So, people felt they had to appease the river gods before crossing and thank them afterwards. Our understanding of prehistoric bridges is that they were wooden structures which often didn’t survive despite all the apotropaic markings and paraphernalia on them. Roman bridges, ultimately built in stone, were much stronger, and much less likely to be washed away. Nonetheless, they had apotropaic markings on them too.

The Piercebridge Case Study

With Phillippa Walton, the local Finds Liaison Officer, Hella has made a case study of river deposits at Piercebridge on the Tees. Three bridges were built there. The first, a wooden structure in the very late Iron Age, related to Stanwick, Queen Cardimandua’s stronghold. The second which was also wooden was probably based on the road layout and settlement in Toft’s field, built around AD 90, and the third, a stone bridge, much later when Dere Street was re-aligned in the late second/early third century.

In the mid 1980s local divers and metal detectorists looked for finds in the Tees at Piercebridge, which are now in Durham museum. This was the period before GPS, and in a challenging environment the divers didn’t record items in context. However, diagrams were made and there is a diary but despite these it is very difficult to be sure of the exact find site of items.

There was a need to look at the whole assemblage of the finds. So, all items were cleaned, and their details uploaded to the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) database and then sorted by period. There were 2,200 objects, 1,444 coins, 40 kg of pottery, and 15 kg of animal bone. Most of these items related to the Roman period. In those days the Tees was a fast-flowing river, and it is highly likely that the bridges would have needed repairs. A supposition that the bridges existed

contemporaneously was attested by the dating of the finds from the different river locations.

There were far more silver coins in the river than at the settlement, whereas animal bones and pottery were both found in similar quantities in both locations.

The types of Roman material were ordered into categories with personal adornment being the largest group, gold being easy for the divers to spot in the murky waters. There were also masses of military material, especially cavalry wherein there was a large assemblage of horse harness fittings, but no swords. These finds indicate Roman troops and merchants were moving up and down this road, and their styles indicate links to the Greek East and the Danubian *limes*.

Understanding river deposits in Roman Britain

Historic England has a standard database and aims to record objects and research deposit patterns. It has a grant to do this which will also allow for mapping. Furthermore, it will look at a comparative site, Trier on the Mosel in Germany where a whole array of stunning objects has been found including 32,000 coins, and around 1,000 lead seals. But here collectors still have

finds in their homes and, besides the question of where and when this material was found, there is a fear of it being lost. Then there is the social history of these people and their relationship to local professionals to explore.

The approaches to Roman river finds are changing. There is now comprehensive analysis of material culture allowing exploration of local identities and practices.

For members interested in this topic Hella Eckardt and Phillippa Walton's book, "Bridge Over Troubled Water: the Roman finds from the River Tees at Piercebridge in context" is available to download from the Britannia Monograph Series on the Archaeological Data Service (ADS) website at: <https://doi.org/10.5284/1085344> free of charge. There are also more general books by Richard Bradley, "The Passage of Arms" and the more recent, "A Geography of Offerings".

Julie Worsfold

BAS Study Group

All meetings of the BAS Study Group are held at the Woosehill Community Hall and on Zoom on the afternoon of the 1st Wednesday in the month.

The September meeting

The September meeting was devoted to the Old Windsor project. The meeting starting with a presentation by Roland Smith who is the project co-leader with Professor Gabor Thomas. He summarised the background to the project and the project objectives which are to collect together and interpret the evidence from three areas of the Hope-Taylor's excavation. They are:

- The great ditch and mill
- The high-status buildings to the east of the mill
- The lower status building to the west of the mill

This was followed by a round robin where the people who worked on the Old Windsor documents recorded what they had found. The key findings were:

- Between 1991 to 1998, there was a project led by Leslie Cram representing Reading Museum working with Hope-Taylor to record and interpret the Old Windsor excavation. English Heritage funded the project with over £80,000.
- Hope-Taylor was a difficult man to work with and was unable to provide a phasing for the site. This lack meant that the work was never able to reach a conclusion.

Darko Maricevic, who is working for the University of Reading, then gave a presentation on the site and the position of Hope-Taylor's trenches.

The October meeting

This meeting started with a presentation by Keith Abbott on the work at Wickham as reported elsewhere in this newsletter.

This was followed by a presentation using the Integrated Archaeological Database (IADB) online to show details of the contexts, finds, the many phases of the use of the site, as outlined in the June newsletter.

The meeting finished with a discussion on the training the Society provided to its members.

The November meeting

The *Cursus Publicus* was the official Roman transport and post system. It was an Empire wide system which transported Roman officials across the Empire. Peter Clifford and Andrew Hutt are completing a paper on the *Cursus Publicus* in the

Berkshire Region. The November study group meeting was devoted to a discussion on the impact of the Romano-British population. In the periods:

- AD 43 to AD 75 The Cogidubnus client kingdom period
- AD 76 to AD 259 The Early Roman period
- AD 260 to AD 410 The Later Roman period

For each period, Peter Clifford gave a brief presentation then we had a round table discussion. Everybody joined in and by the end we all had a better understanding of how the *Cursus Publicus* was used to promote the interests of the Roman Authorities and the local Romano-British elite and provided employment for a large number of families across the Berkshire Region.

Andrew Hutt

Projects' Updates...

Cookham Abbey – The Story Continues...

Work at the Cookham Abbey site took place from Monday 24th July to Saturday 2nd September, and was conducted by the army of students belonging to the University of Reading Archaeology Field School plus volunteers who came from far and wide. But most were members of local societies, not least of all BAS, working under the Middle Thames Archaeology Partnership (MTAP) umbrella, and from the Maidenhead Search Society, who fielded one or two detectorists each day to comb the spoil heaps.

BAS members Keith Abbott and James Peddle made a significant contribution in inducting archaeological newcomers to the site and teaching new things to the experienced. It was a great pleasure to see volunteers doing the key work of surveying for levels, recording by writing context sheets and drawing plans of contexts and features.



Notably, the volunteer brigade – numbering almost eighty in relays over the six-week period to the end of August – was assigned the task of opening and excavating a new trench. Trench 3 was a slot from the northern edge of Trench 1 as opened in 2022 to attempt to locate the boundary of the Abbey site and establish where the edge of the River Thames lay in the mid-Saxon period. This involved squeezing through a space between trees on the boundary between the Church Paddock and the riverside open space known as Bell Rope Meadow. We were constrained by the Environment Agency as to how far we could take our trench towards a flood bund which lay between us and the river, but what we were able to do has probably added a fantastic new dimension to the site.

The first significant feature we uncovered was a stone foundation on an East-West orientation running the width of the trench and presumably continuing either side, made of large flint nodules. This seemed likely to be a boundary wall of the Abbey site. To the North of this we encountered a cut feature, at first presumed to be an enclosure ditch beyond the presumed wall. However, excavation proved these features to be even more interesting than first thought. The ditch was cut very steeply, very deep and showed evidence of a timber revetment on both sides. Not an obvious boundary ditch! Below the excavation level we cored down to the natural, two metres down, above which was a layer of peat.

So, after excavation the most favoured interpretation is that we have found a mill leat. While this theory remains to be tested, we know that monasteries of the mid-Saxon period were noted for reintroducing technology such as watermills which had disappeared from Britain after the Roman withdrawal. However, only two examples of such watermills have been excavated in Britain, so this is a feature of really significant potential.

The leat had large quantity of midden material dumped into it when it went out of use, suggesting abandonment in the early medieval period. It is a clear target for future seasons – the mill itself is presumed to be located downstream of the leat where we have opened it, possibly in the area available for excavation, but not necessarily. Fingers are crossed!

Finding this mill leat more than makes up for not finding the site boundary or the ancient riverbank profile (yet!). The leat is clearly within the Abbey bounds, as excavation in Trench 3 further to the North above the leat showed rich occupation material of mid-Saxon date consistent with Trench 1 as opened in 2022 and further explored in 2023.

Turning to Trench 1 we were able to make a major leap forward from some of the interpretation made in 2022, at first as a result of finding another feature in Trench 3. This was a circular deposit of flint packing, aligned North-South with two similar features discovered in 2022. These two flint deposits were tentatively interpreted then as being oven bases. The presence of three features of identical size, perfectly aligned and equidistant made it obvious we were looking at the very large post holes which must have supported the enormous timber posts of a hall. Half-sectioning the holes confirms this interpretation.

If it is of the same date as the abbey, this hall could represent a major monastic functional building, such as a refectory or dormitory. Other sites have shown that monastic settlements have been preceded by (presumably) royal halls, so we must wait for further evidence. The hall is tucked in a corner between two Anglo-Saxon streets, and shows wonderful preservation of floors, hearths, and other internal features. Preserved at this floor level is a wonderful hearth, rectangular in shape, right in the central axis of the building, telling us that it was a residential building, a hearth important for providing both heat and light. A hearth also has a symbolic meaning as the focal point of such buildings. Samples from the hearth are to be submitted for archaeomagnetic dating – if it works, this could provide a date for the last firing of the hearth.

Cut into the roadway to the North of the hall is a well, which was safely excavated down to the water table – another terrific volunteer input in constructing and placing the shoring for the deep and constricted excavation. The well proved to have a timber lining preserved in waterlogged conditions at the bottom. More analysis to be done!

Meanwhile, on the other side of the site, huge strides were made in excavating the Anglo-Saxon cemetery first uncovered in 2022. Trench 2 across one of the cemeteries – there may have been more – attached to the monastery was extended from the previous year to the Western boundary of the site. It has proven to be a complex area of burial archaeology. The density of burial was unexpected – we can now see a large area of burial activity over several generations.

Only a portion of the burial archaeology in the 20mx20m area was excavated. The process is delicate and required skilled and patient excavation by students and volunteers. The burials excavated comprised two rows, overlapping, at the Western end of the trench; and two rows more clearly defined at the Eastern edge of the trench. On the Western side, the density of burial is marked, interments being very tightly packed, repeated over several generations. The community buried here is demographically mixed of both sexes and a range of ages from neonate to older adult. This has to be interpreted as a lay cemetery in the context of the Abbey.



There is variation in burial rites: some are shroud burial; others, a smaller number, in coffins. There are also variations in body posture. Analysis of these remains is an important post-ex task to give a human-centred perspective on the contemporary population. For example, lab analysis will shed light on pathologies and health. There may possibly be evidence of medical practices, monasteries being a locus of medical work. Earliest burials at monastic sites tend to be high-status, but this is not necessarily the case here. One individual, for example, is buried with a finger ring made of iron.

Crucially, involvement of our volunteer brigade has not stopped at the end of the dig at the beginning of September. A team of half-a-dozen or so volunteers has been working steadily since October to assist the University in tidying up and entering site data into the Integrated Archaeological Database being employed to manage a large volume of site records in a way which can enable inferences to be drawn on stratification and site chronology. This level of involvement of volunteers may be unprecedented – it shows in any case the quality of working relationship that has been built between the University Department and the volunteer community, something which we expect only to enhance in coming seasons of this project.

Another really pleasing outcome of this season was an uplift of public interest. Nearly 2,000 visitors came through the site in August. One visitor was so impressed that she donated a large sum on the spot and was pleased to offer further support – which has materialised as a top up to University funds for analysis of the human remains. With funding sorted, I am delighted to say this project is under way.

The outreach and fundraising activities for this project are being managed by the Friends of Cookham Abbey, a Trust set up for this purpose. Just before the dig season this year, the Friends appointed Sarah Parfitt as Community Engagement Manager and was able to draw on Sarah's extensive network of media professionals to generate a huge uplift in media attention for the project. While media attention is all very exciting, the important detailed engagement work has started since the dig in developing an outreach programme to take the message to schools and community groups around the region. I am pleased to say that BAS is involved in this effort, building on work done over the last year or so on producing educational materials.

Please have a look at the Friends of Cookham Abbey website: <https://www.cookhamabbey.org.uk/>. And if your appetite to join the volunteer brigade next year has been whetted, please let me know.

Paul Seddon

Geophysics Surveying at Wickham

Following on from the first phase of geophysics surveying at Wickham House in June/July, which revealed a number of rectilinear anomalies along the route of the Ermin Street Roman Road (Margary 41) from Silchester to Cirencester, we were very grateful to be invited back to continue our work across areas of the estate not yet covered. Our first survey had revealed a number of rectilinear anomalies tentatively interpreted as the remains of a Romano-British roadside settlement extending some 800m SE to NW along Ermin Street close to where previous BAS geophysics surveys had placed the junction of Ermin Street with the Roman Road to Bath (Margary 53).

This latest survey took place during September 2023, which fortunately coincided with some unseasonably warm weather which allowed the project to complete ahead of plan, during which time some 25 BAS members, and some local residents took part! Surveying to the south of Wickham House revealed anomalies relating to metaled driveways and building foundations dated to the Georgian period from historic maps and paintings. But also revealed were a cluster of circular anomalies tentatively interpreted as the possible gullies of a group with round houses, and a curious 'L-Shaped' surface which will need further investigation to identify.



Figure 1. Earth resistance surveying across rough ground at Wickham

Further to the west the latest survey located a wide area of rectilinear anomalies, some aligned with the Roman Road and others on a different alignment. These results give us a further indication of the extent of the possible Roman period settlement and suggest that a later phase of settlement was built on a different alignment in the same location. Historic maps tell us that by the Georgian period this land was being used for agriculture.

Taken together the geophysics surveys suggest at least three phases of occupation across this site prior to the Georgian period, and that during the Roman period Wickham was comparable in size to (if not larger than) the modern-day settlement, with a number of multi-roomed masonry footed buildings centered around the junction of the two roads and extending along Ermin Street in both directions. Metal detecting finds recorded on the Portable Antiquities Scheme from the same area date suggest the settlement was active from the 1st to 4th centuries AD, reaching its zenith in the late 4th century and most likely continuing into the Early Medieval period. The project team will continue to work over the winter months on writing up our survey results and planning possible next steps for the coming season to further investigate this fascinating corner of West Berkshire.

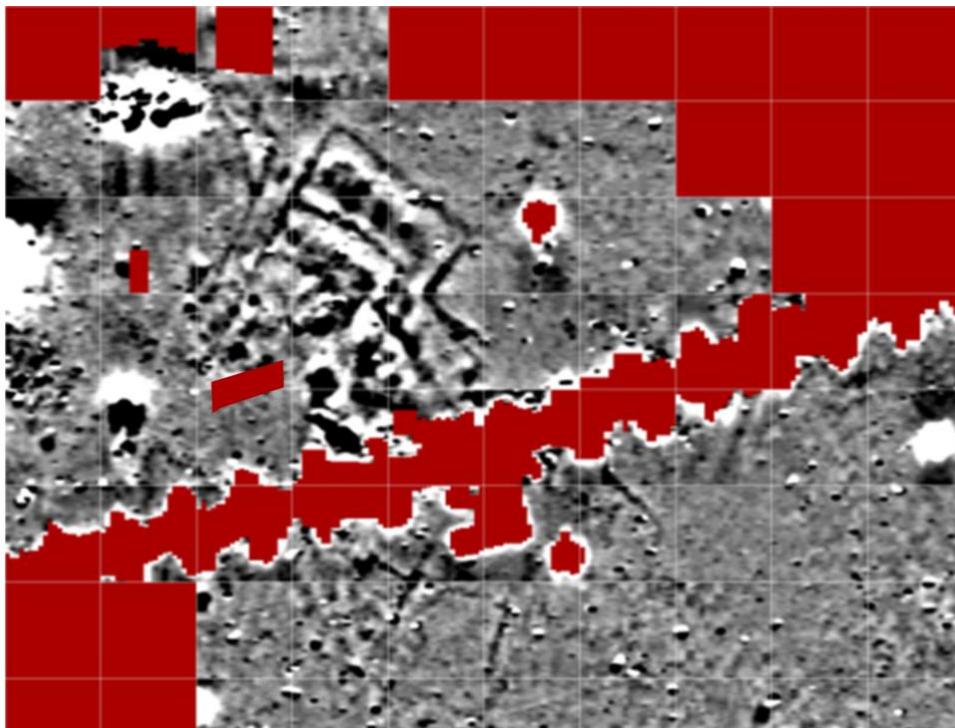


Figure 2. Rectilinear anomalies observed in Area 4

Keith Abbott

Unlocking Old Windsor: BAS volunteers at Reading Museum

Over nine days between May and September this year, 15 BAS members came to Reading Museum's store in south Reading to help catalogue the documentary archive of Brian Hope-Taylor's 1955-7 excavations at Old Windsor. Although most of the material we would today consider a data archive is with Hope-Taylor's other papers at Historic Environment Scotland (HES), we felt that what we have would contain insights into the excavation and post-excavation (or lack of it), and the collection's history in the museum. Much work had already been done to order and re-box the archive and list its contents, but the aim of this exercise was to produce a detailed index with a view to developing a classification system for this type of archive, potentially making them more accessible.

The volunteers looked through and recorded two boxes of correspondence, sets of object X-rays and conservation reports, and 70 rolls of excavation negatives. They also documented for the first time a thick folder of papers transferred from English Heritage for addition to the archive. This gave a fascinating insight into both the history of archaeology and the character of Hope-Taylor himself. Much of the correspondence related to a period thirty years after the excavation, when specialist reports were being produced with funding from English Heritage – in some cases significantly hampered by the limitations of the original excavation records. University of Southampton animal bone expert Jennie Coy lamented that she was unable to produce a usable report, writing 'Despite the obvious prestige and interest of the site [...] to study these bones without a broad chronological framework (i.e., some real phasing) [...] would be a waste of the taxpayers' money'; Hope-Taylor defended his stratigraphy, dismissing phasing as a 'worthy but inappropriate cult-term'!

Afterwards, volunteers moved on to searching the HES online catalogue <https://canmore.org.uk/> for any digitised material relevant to objects in our collections, particularly images of them, and annotating the negative list with links to the corresponding contact sheets.

The next stage will be to compare the illustrations on the Canmore website with those we hold to identify any overlap, then to add references to the X-rays, conservation reports and online resources into the object records on our Modes database. We would also love to write a blog about the excavation based on what we've discovered in the correspondence! The work has already proved useful in locating information on timber sampling and we would like to extend our thanks to all the volunteers for their contributions.

Angela Houghton (Collection Management Curator, Reading Museum)

Harriet Haugvik (Collections Assistant, Reading Museum)

Ritual and Rubbish in the Thames: MTAP Volunteers at the Royal Berkshire Archives

Over the last two months a team of Middle Thames Archaeology Partnership (MTAP) volunteers have begun the process of systematically analysing the contents of the Thames Conservancy Archive held at the Royal Berkshire Archives (formerly the Berkshire Record Office). The examination of this archive is being undertaken as part of an Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funded doctoral research project at the University of Reading 'Three Thousand Years of Ritual and Rubbish in the Thames'.

The river Thames is a rich archaeological resource, producing more artefacts than any other British river, with over 3,500 objects recovered from the Middle Thames region alone. Yet the recovery and collection processes through which these artefacts have reached museum collections is often poorly understood. The project volunteers have been working independently to systematically examine and record over 100 years of Thames Conservancy records, producing a comprehensive database of dredging activity, riverine maintenance, and artefact recovery in the Thames between 1866 and 1973. This has produced some fascinating insights into how the changing priorities of riverine maintenance has shaped the archaeological record of the Thames. Whilst research is ongoing, preliminary results suggest that dredging, although typically assumed to be the primary means of artefact recovery, may not have produced as many artefacts as other forms of work on the river such as the construction and demolition of locks, weirs, and commercial landings. The results also suggest that several previously identified 'hotspots' of archaeological finds, may more accurately reflect Victorian dredging regimes than sites of genuine archaeological interest.

Examination of the archive will continue throughout the next few months into early 2024, though the early results are encouraging, and the project volunteers have found many interesting snippets of local history within the archive, including several alarming events such as in 1922 the Conservators recorded that "we woke up one morning and half of Teddington Weir had disappeared...". The next stages of the project will expand our research to examine historical maps alongside LIDAR and bathymetric data to identify historical crossing points on the river Thames. This data will then be cross-referenced with artefact distributions and our dredging regime model to further evaluate the unique archaeological record of the Middle Thames. The volunteer's work so far has already challenged our preconceived ideas about riverine archaeology, and I would like to thank all the participants for their time and ongoing contribution to the project.

If you are interested in joining this project, please contact me directly: m.clifford@pgr.reading.ac.uk

Miles Clifford

BAS Finds Group

The BAS Finds Group was established to encourage BAS members to take an interest in the artefacts found on archaeological excavations by processing the finds from the Blounts Court excavations.

The September meeting

The first meeting of the newly formed BAS Finds Group was held on Tuesday 5th September at 7.30 in the Committee Room at Woosehill Community Centre. Fourteen members attended.

The meeting was set up to begin reviewing the finds from Blounts Court. The first presentation was given by Andrew who showed the phase diagram he had produced from information entered in the Integrated Archaeological Data Base (IADB). This showed how the site progressed from Roman to late Georgian times.

This was followed by a presentation by Martin Labrum on nails, their shape and dating potential.

Members were then able to inspect some of the metalwork from the excavations.

The meeting discussed our approach to the major find types, namely CBM and pottery, and concluded that workshops with pottery and CBM experts could be the best way to progress.

The late October/November meeting

This meeting on 31st October 2023 focussed on Ceramic Building Material (CBM). Most of the CBM from Blounts Court is tile – Roman and 16th -17th century, with some bricks and some daub. The CBM was taken to the meeting in bags in boxes organised by trench (e.g., trench 1 CBM, trench 2 CBM etc.). These were laid out on tables and, after some discussion, were reorganised by CBM type (e.g., encaustic tiles, roof and floor tile, and bricks).

As a result of the meeting, work has been done to check the bags of finds against the CBM finds records in the IADB in preparation for the CBM workshop with Kevin Hayward on 5th December 2023.

Andrew Hutt

Talks by other groups

Berkshire Archaeological Research Group (BARG)

BARG holds quarterly evening meetings in person at The Cornerstone, Norreys Ave, Wokingham RG40 1UE. £3 fee for non-members. <http://www.barg-online.org/calendar>

Maidenhead Archaeological and Historical Society (MAHS)

Talks are usually on the last Wednesday in the month on Zoom - 7.50pm for start at 8pm.

£3 fee for non-members. For the list of forthcoming talks and to book:

<https://www.ticketsource.co.uk/maidenhead-archaeological-and-historical-society>

For more information please email: paul(at)c21networks.co.uk

Marlow Archaeology Group (MAG)

Talks are once a month on varying Thursdays and start at 8pm. For more information and to book those on Zoom: <https://www.marlowarch.co.uk>

South Oxfordshire Archaeological Group (SOAG)

Talks now run from October to April (except January) on the first Thursday in the month starting at 7.30pm and are either in-person at **Sonning Common Village Hall or on Zoom**. Talks are open to all although donations at the door are appreciated. For more information:

<http://www.soagarch.org.uk/events.html>

West Berkshire Museum

Offers talks and courses. Information at:

https://booking.westberks.gov.uk/heritage_events.html#?location=West%20Berkshire%20Museum

It is also possible to sign up for event information on this page.

My thanks to all the contributors to this newsletter and to Anne Harrison for proof-reading.

If you have an archaeological story, you feel would interest the Society, please email it to Tim Lloyd, who produces 'What's On', the society's monthly e-newsheet, at webmaster(at)berksarch.co.uk and to me at newsletter(at)berksarch.co.uk by the 27th of the month.

Please submit your text and images separately as this makes them much easier for Tim and me to handle than when the images are embedded in the text.

The copy date for the next edition of this publication, the Society's quarterly newsletter, is Tuesday, 27th February 2024.

Thank you,
Julie Worsfold

BERKSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY



Patron: Her Late Majesty The Queen

President: Professor Michael Fulford
CBE FBA FSA

The Society was founded in 1871 and for over 150 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 newly found or long standing, the Society offers activities from regular lectures, an annual Day School (conference) and visits to excavations and research.

All members receive a monthly e-news sheet with news of the Society's events and other events in Berkshire, this quarterly newsletter and a free copy of The Berkshire Archaeological Journal published by the Society.

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