



# ARCHAEOLOGY

The Newsletter of the Berkshire Archaeological Society

Summer 2024

Vol. 26, No.2

## 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 Tim Lloyd ([webmaster\[at\]berksarch.co.uk](mailto:webmaster[at]berksarch.co.uk)) 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 4th June 2024:** BAS Study Group: 7:30pm

**Monday 10th June 2024:** BAS Visit: Villa Ventorum. Organiser: Tim Lloyd [webmaster\[at\]berksarch.co.uk](mailto:webmaster[at]berksarch.co.uk)

**Wednesday 12th June 2024:** BAS Lunch: 12 noon

### **SUMMER BREAK**

**Tuesday 3rd September 2024:** BAS Finds Group 7:30pm

**Wednesday 4th September 2024:** BAS Study Group: 2:30pm

**Wednesday 11th September 2024:** BAS Lunch: 12 noon

**Saturday 21st September 2024:** Lecture: *PAS in Berkshire 2023-2024* by Phil Smithers, Finds Liaison Officer, West Berkshire.

**Tuesday 1st October 2024:** BAS Finds Group 7:30pm

**Wednesday 2nd October 2024:** BAS Study Group: 2:30pm

**Saturday 5th October 2024:** BAS Day School: 10.00am to 4.00pm St Nicolas' Church Hall, Newbury, RG14 5HG.

**Wednesday 9th October 2024:** BAS Lunch: 12 noon

**Saturday 19th October 2024:** AGM followed by Lecture: *Dr Brian Hope-Taylor and the investigation of timber halls in northern Bernicia – an evolving story* by Professor Ian Ralston, University of Edinburgh.

Compiled by Julie Worsfold

## From the Chair

### Royal patronage

In 1891, Queen Victoria became patron of the Society. The letter from Lord Ponsonby confirming the Queen's patronage is held in the Royal Berkshire Archives. Successive monarchs: Edward VII, George V, George VI, and Elizabeth II renewed their patronage. When Prince Charles became King, we were informed that there would be a review of Royal patronages and in May I received a letter that confirmed that King Charles would not continue as our patron.

IN  
BERKSHIRE

This change is not surprising. In 1891, the excavations at Silchester had just started and fieldwork was largely sponsored by the elite. Nowadays, archaeology is firmly embedded in UK and European culture and is largely a professional activity directed by central and local government, supported by Historic England and a small but active archaeological industry and university archaeology departments.

### **The geophysics equipment**

The geophysics survey at Hurley in January succeeded in damaging both the Society's gradiometer and earth resistance meter. I am pleased to tell you that these have now been repaired. The challenge we are now facing is that both Keith Abbott and I are busy with other projects so there are no plans to deploy them in the coming weeks.

### **The Berkshire Archaeological Journal**

I am currently working on volume 87 of the Berkshire Archaeological Journal. This has 18 articles covering excavations by Oxford Archaeology, Wessex Archaeology, Thames Valley Archaeological Services, and others. I recently put out a call for proof-readers and was pleasantly surprised that 19 of you volunteered to help. Thank you.

The work is progressing well and I looking forward to delivering a finished journal by the end of the year.

*Andrew Hutt*

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## **Archaeology on Saturdays**

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

Katie Manby explained that structural iron nails, the most common iron artefact found during excavations, were regarded as having little archaeological value. Today's talk was to show that in some cases, iron nails could reveal interesting, previously lost, information.

Katie gave us an introduction to wrought iron nails; how they were made by a blacksmith, and with the 'shank' being the part of the nail between the head and the sharp tip. Later, she would explain how shank morphology was useful in determining how a nail was once used.

We looked at previous typologies of nails, such as that of Cleere (1958) based on just 150 nails from Brading Villa, Isle of Wight. The typology of Manning (1985), who studied well-preserved nails found in London at the British Museum, was mostly used to type Roman nails, whereas the typology of Goodall (1980/2011) was used for medieval nails.

Katie talked of issues with these typologies, especially in what was recorded, such as the shape of the nail head, which was of little use in determining how the nail had been used. Manning's Type 1b nail tended to predominate, usually representing 80-90% of all nails found on Romano-British sites, and yet it was not known how exactly they were used.

We saw examples of nails as found on archaeological sites, including un-identifiable lumps of rust, where only X-rays could reveal what lay within. Katie talked of poor storage conditions in some museums, where iron nails kept in non-airtight containers in damp rooms would eventually completely decay into rust.

A survey of current nail recording practice showed a wide variety of approaches, with some archaeologists using Manning's typology, others using none, a few people noting details of certain nail types, and with nail count and weight usually recorded. Katie explained that from this recorded data, she had been unable to ascertain how the nails had been used, so she had turned to shank morphology.

By studying the shape of nail shanks, Katie hoped to determine how the nails had been used. We looked at a variety of nail shank shapes; straight, curved, s-shaped, turned, hooked, double clenched, and a very odd-looking nail with a curled shank. Katie also used experimental blacksmithing to further her research; making wrought iron nails, hammering them into wood, and then trying to extract them.

What Katie learnt was that wrought iron nails were soft and needed a pilot hole in the wood to get them started. Also, that when she attempted to extract nails, especially long ones, the heads often broke off, meaning these nails could not be re-used.

She also found that clenched nails were impossible to extract without damaging the nail. We looked at an image of clenched nails holding two pieces of wood together, with the nails' shanks bent over at right angles to 'clench' the nail to the wood. Katie pointed out that with clenched nails it was possible to measure the distance between the head and the bend in the shank; the internal clench length, and hence determine the total thickness of the two pieces of wood.

Katie then introduced the A14 Cambridge to Huntingdon Improvement Scheme excavations, where a total of 5775 nail fragments had been found, of which 1569 were Manning's Type 1b, and 1122 were hobnails from boots. The nails were grouped by context, and we looked at those found at the River Great Ouse, Settlement 2 site.

At this site there had been organic settlement in the Iron Age, developing in the Roman period into a planned settlement fronting a villa complex. We looked at the lengths of the nails found here, ranging from 18.2 to 170.0mm, and also the internal clenched lengths. These ranged from 10.2 to 91.8mm, with a positive skew to smaller lengths of 16.2 to 33.7mm. In other words, most of the clenched nails had been holding together **small** pieces of wood.

We looked at a map of Settlement 2 showing where the nails had been found. Most were located at three main areas. The first, a blacksmith's forge, showed a higher concentration of nails than at nearby buildings. Dumped nails included many used nails, and the blacksmith did not seem to have been interested in recycling. With wooden forges more likely to burn down than other wooden buildings, it was thought that the large number of used nails found could have been the remains of previous forges.

The second area studied included a Late Roman multi-phase building and a midden. The midden contained large numbers of used nails, their condition suggesting that they had been discarded while within wood, and with no attempt made to extract and recycle the iron nails. The pattern of internal clenched lengths, which showed the thickness of the pieces of wood held together by the nails, suggested different types of construction, possibly within the same building.

The third area looked at comprised a multi-phase Roman timber gateway and a trackway. The 36 nails excavated from one deposit near the gateway may have been manufactured for a specific purpose. From the trackway

came a variety of nail shank shapes including 16 straight, 6 curved, 4 turned and 2 s-shaped nails. Also found here were 2 curled shank nails, and a nail with such a large head, it was thought to be a decorative stud.

From her studies, Katie had various recommendations for the future recording of nails. These included the X-raying of all nails (if possible), more detailed recording, including the noting of clenched or otherwise modified nails, and not wasting time by recording weight!

Katie showed us her new Nail Typology and Condition Scale. Nails were grouped according to size and shape, and labelled according to their likely function, such as general use, weight-bearing, decorative, etc. Katie's condition scale gave more detailed information than one we had seen earlier, which simply classed nail condition as 'good', 'moderate' or 'poor'. Katie also suggested detailed recording of individual nail groups, for example, those from burials, and from formation or demolition deposits.

In conclusion, Katie emphasised the need for a consistent recording practice, and the need for a new usage focused typology. She pointed out the importance of shank morphology in determining usage, and hence the need to record shank data. Evidence to suggest straight, curved or s-shaped nails had been extracted from wood for recycling, as suggested by other archaeologists, was difficult to find, and the likelihood of any nails actually being recycled needed to be studied further. There was a need for further experimental work, which appeared to be an enjoyable prospect for Katie!

*Joan Burrow-Newton*

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## BAS Guided Tour of the Silchester Exhibition



On 17<sup>th</sup> April twenty BAS members were delighted to be Mike Fulford's guests for his guided tour of the exhibition "Becoming Roman – Silchester Town of Change" at the Willis Museum in Basingstoke.

The aim of the exhibition was to sum up the archaeological investigations that have taken place under Mike's direction over a fifty-year span at the Iron Age and Roman Town of Calleva (Silchester).

For those members on the tour who had worked at Silchester, the presentation of finds highlights from the digs was a journey of personal memory. For others, it was a revelation of how much has been learned through painstaking archaeological research. In answer to a question from a participant, Mike hazarded that excavations to date had covered less than one per cent of the surface area of the walled town, hinting at how much more there is to discover in future excavations.

Familiar finds from recent years included the Nero-stamped tile from the bathhouse excavation and many other ceramic and metalwork objects. There were unexpected items among the familiar: for example, some tiny Anglo-Saxon coins and the skeleton of what was said to be the first British lapdog.

Places on the tour were limited for obvious practical reasons, but you can still catch up with the exhibition on tour. This is scheduled for the Red House Museum, Christchurch from 20<sup>th</sup> July to 1<sup>st</sup> September 2024; and the Andover Museum from

6<sup>th</sup> September to 24<sup>th</sup> November 2024. The Hampshire Cultural Trust website suggests that the exhibition may run at either Reading Museum or the University Reading but at the time of writing no date has been given and there is no guarantee of an opportunity to see the exhibition in Reading.

*Paul Seddon*

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## Old Windsor - Update

Progress is being made on writing the full report of the excavation, while finds data is being added to the records in the IADB (Integrated Archaeology Data Base) which BAS members helped to populate last year with their work in the museum store and with the context records on-line.

*Anne Harrison*

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## The BAS Study Group

### The March Meeting

There were two items on the agenda for this meeting:

#### A New GPS System

The March 2024 Study Group meeting started with a presentation by James Peddle for the Society to purchase a new Global Positioning System (GPS). This system uses a combination of satellite signals and RTK (Real Time Kinematic) data generated by terrestrial monitoring systems to apply corrections so that it gives a final accuracy of  $\pm 10\text{mm}$ . The proposed system is the Emlid RCH301 Reach RX which collects data from satellites and RTK data via a mobile phone accessed via a blue tooth connection. The survey results are displayed and collected on the mobile phone using an app (EmlidFlow) which is available for the Emlid RCH301 Reach RX.

The way forward, agreed by the BAS Council, is to hire the equipment for a trial during either an excavation or geophysics survey and if that is successful make a purchase.

#### Interpreting Blounts Court

The second half of the March meeting was devoted to reviewing the interpretation of the Blounts Court excavation. I presented an interpretation workbook which showed that the interpretation of the archaeology was firmly linked to the contexts and finds revealed during the excavation. This is new technology which I am developing as a key component of the Anchurus II replacement for the Integrated Archaeology Database (IADB).

The presentation was a success as it confirmed that the workbook could be used by a group to discuss and review the archaeological interpretation of the site. The current interpretation of the site is summarised below.

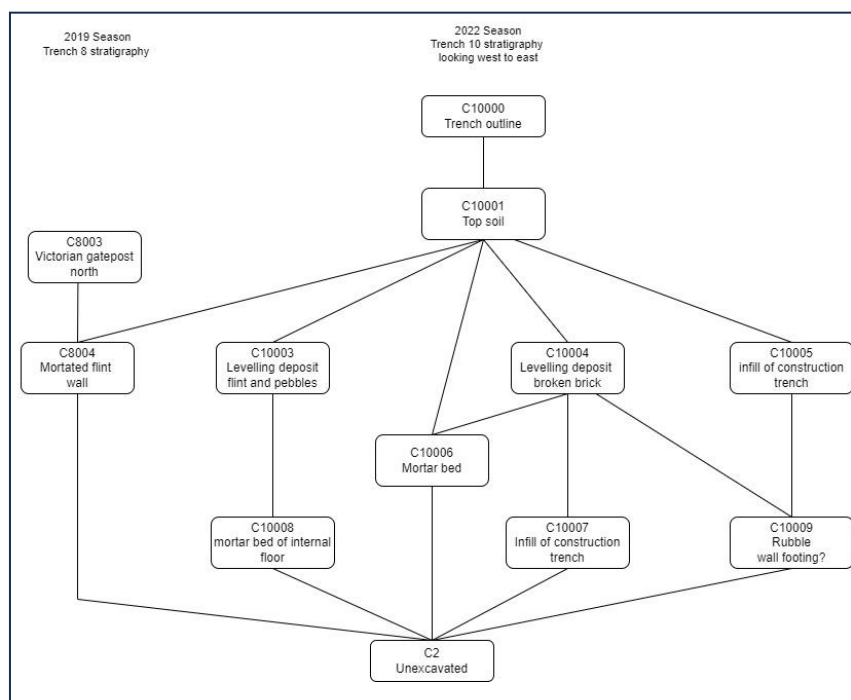
### The May Meeting

The May meeting started with a presentation by Keith Abbott of two case studies he is presenting as part of his dissertation for his master's degree. We will hear more about this in the coming months.

The second half of the meeting was a presentation by me on using Draw IO to draw archaeological stratigraphic matrices. The figure below shows the Stratigraphic matrix for trench 10 at Blounts Court. Each of the boxes shows in context with its context identifier and name. The vertical axis shows the depth of the context while the lines show that one context is above another. For example, context C10001, topsoil lay above context C10008 a bed of mortar.

Normally, a stratigraphic matrix box just has the context identifier, the inclusion of the context name makes the matrix more understandable and hence reduces the cognitive load on archaeologists using it.

This work is being done as part of the development of Anchurus II a collection of IT applications which will replace the Society's use of the Integrated Archaeology Database (IADB).



Stratigraphy matrix for Blounts Court trench 10.

Andrew Hutt

## The BAS Finds Group

The March meeting of the BAS Finds group was a working meeting. Some of us worked through a bag of tile Ceramic Building Material comparing the tile with our reference collection. Some of us recorded pottery in the Integrated Archaeology Database (IADB).

The May Finds Group meeting started with a presentation by Nigel Spencer on the work that he and Martin Labram have been doing on the Blounts Court nails. His presentation started with an overview of how nails had been made from Roman times onwards. The key message was that they were largely hand made until the industrial developments in the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards. He then went on to discuss the x-rays of nails done by Dr. Gareth Hatton at Johnson Matthey (the Blounts Court site owner) to reveal details of the metalwork. He then presented a tomography analysis which showed a 360-degree rotating image of the full solid shape outline of a nail, including its head, shaft and point. His presentation ended with suggestions of how the nails had been used in the buildings at Blounts Court.

The second half of the May meeting was devoted to a discussion of the interpretation of the archaeology at Blounts Court based on the Interpretation workbook. This is important because the finds help date the contexts which allow you to identify features and events which occurred on the site over time.

### The archaeology of Blounts Court

The work to date has shown that there were 5 phases of development and use of the site. From the earliest to the latest these are:

**The Roman period:** with a north /south boundary wall with a managed woodland to the east and a field to the west

**The medieval period:** which saw the construction of Kent's Manor, and phase I of Blounts Court House with a flint faced wall to the east of and aligned with the south wall of Blounts Court House. The field to the south of Blounts Court House was used as a garden

**The period from 1500 to 1725** saw the construction of phases 2 and 3 of Blounts Court House, thereby creating a large farmhouse. The Roman wall was demolished, at least in part, and a timber framed barn and a farm building were erected in the garden to the south of Blounts Court House

**The period from 1725 to 1850**, when the barn was taken down and moved to Blounts Court Farm and the farm building was demolished. The evidence suggests that floor of the barn could have been used as a hard standing for carriages.

Blounts Court House was remodelled by creating the large porch and entrance leading to a grand staircase and upgrading some of the rooms thereby creating the Georgian country house we see today. In the grounds a flint and brick Georgian wall was constructed to separate the grounds of the house from the farm to the east with a gateway at the junction with the medieval flint faced wall. In early Victorian times this gateway was narrowed to a pedestrian gateway

**The period from 1850 to 2020:** when the Georgian wall was demolished and the land laid out more or less as we know it today with lawns, trees and a pond. A map of the area confirms this was in place by 1870.

Work is progressing to get this material into a publishable state.

*Andrew Hutt*

## Talks by other groups

### **Maidenhead Archaeological and Historical Society (MAHS)**

Talks continue during the summer months usually on the last Wednesday in the month both in person and 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

### **West Berkshire Museum**

Offers talks, courses, and exhibitions. Information at:

[https://booking.westberks.gov.uk/heritage\\_events.html#!location=West%20Berkshire%20Museum](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.

## Input to the quarterly newsletter and monthly e-newsheet – ‘What’s On’

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 27<sup>th</sup> 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 current copy date for the next edition of this publication, the Society’s quarterly newsletter, is Tuesday, 27th August 2024.

Thank you,

*Julie Worsfold*

## BERKSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY



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.

### **Officers of the Society:**

**Chair:** Andrew Hutt  
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For more contacts and more information about the Society visit:  
[www.berksarch.co.uk](http://www.berksarch.co.uk)



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