



ARCHAEOLOGY in Berkshire

The Newsletter of the Berkshire Archaeological Society

Spring 2025 Volume 28 Number 1

Dates for your Diary

Venues (unless advised otherwise):

BAS Finds Group (in person and on Zoom) 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 (tim.lloyd@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 membership@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.

Wednesday 8th April **BAS Study Group 2:30pm**

Wednesday 15th April **BAS Pub Lunch: 12:00pm TBC**

Saturday 25th April **BAS Lecture: topic TBA by Dr J. W. Hanson (FHEA), University of Oxford**

Wednesday 6th May **BAS Study Group 2:30pm**

Wednesday 13th May **BAS Pub Lunch: 12:00pm TBC**

Wednesday 3rd June **BAS Study Group 2:30pm**

Wednesday 10th June **BAS Pub Lunch: 12:00pm TBC**

From the Chair

Post-excavation work:

Across the Archaeology Industry, very few people get involved in post-excavation work. This is due to the required knowledge and skills and to the costs; post-excavation workers are more highly paid than diggers. For the last 8 months, some 90 BAS members have been involved in the post-excavation work relating to both the Wickham and Blounts Court excavations. In order to do this, we have developed working practices, learned how to use generic software applications such as Draw IO and QGIS to draw stratigraphic matrices and site and context plans and encouraged a large number of people to do the work.

Thanks are due to everybody who has chosen to get involved. There is more to do, so if you want to get involved contact Keith Abbott or me.

The Society's current bank account:

At the AGM in October 2025, you voted to appoint James Peddie at the Society's treasurer. When James approached Lloyds Bank to be recognised as the Society's treasurer, the Bank responded by giving us notice that they would be closing our current account in February 2026. Since then, James led seven applications from the Trustees to Lloyds Bank for a new account which were all declined due to minor errors. After that, the Society's trustees acted by reducing the number of trustees registered at the Charity Commission to five. They are Andrew Hutt, Keith Abbott, James Peddie, Tim Lloyd and Tony Bakker. On 24th March 2026, we each received an email from Lloyds Bank telling us that the Society has a new bank account. (See item at end on subscriptions).

Congratulations to James for leading this effort and to all those who have supported him.

Andrew Hutt

Archaeology on Saturdays

An Iron-Age to Post-Roman Landscape on the Berkshire Downs, by.

by Dr John Naylor 17th January 2026

Dr John Naylor started his talk by describing the work of the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS), with which many of us are familiar, and his role as a PAS National Finds Advisor. He went on to tell us about an upland site on the Berkshire Downs, and how the many metal detectorists' finds associated with it have been studied and interpreted.

A geophysical survey had revealed a track, curving with the hill's contours, and also 2nd century AD Roman fields. At the 'Berkshire Downs' site, the metal detectorists found about 1,350 coins, mostly Roman. Over 250 metal objects were found, many of which were items of dress or jewellery. About 200 Roman potsherds were collected, some casually by metal detectorists, who tended to pick up easy-to-identify pottery, such as rim sherds or Samian ware. However, during the geophysical survey, a greater variety of potsherds were collected.

John recorded all the coins on the PAS database, with the exception of a fake one-pound coin! The most interesting coin was a unique copper-alloy Roman radiate of Allectus (AD293-296), which has been designated of National importance. Coins found at the 'Berkshire Downs' site ranged from the Iron Age to the Modern period, with the bulk (1,275 coins) coming from the Roman Empire period.

Metal detectorists were interested in detecting and collecting copper-alloy (232 pieces) but were not interested in iron (6 pieces), of which much would have been expected from a settlement site. Likewise, the detectorists had little interest in ceramics (69 potsherds), and while the geophysical surveyors gathered a few more (160 potsherds), very much more would be expected from a settlement site.

We saw that the bulk of the metal finds (excluding coins) were items of dress (85 pieces), personal adornment (55 pieces), and toilet-related (13 pieces). There were 17 domestic items found, 2 leisure, 2 animal-related and 1 weapon.

We then looked at all the finds in chronological order, starting with Pre-Iron Age objects. Part of a probable Neolithic stone mace-head was found, as well as Bronze Age metalwork; a cauldron fragment, a finger ring and broken blade tips. The Late Iron Age period was seen to be the start of long-term activity at the 'Berkshire Downs' site. A rare find was a La Tene III Giubiasco type brooch, of which few have been found in Britain. Other finds included a gold stater of the Regni or Atrebatas, and a silver denarius of the Roman Republic. John said some coins were very worn, and may possibly have been brought to Britain by Roman soldiers in the 1st to 3rd centuries AD. The valuable items again suggest ritual deposition at this upland site, which may have been a small, simple temple, now completely ploughed away, like the possible track-side settlement.

The 'Berkshire Downs' site had many more Reece period 19 (AD364-378) coins than the regional mean, showing above average coin loss at the site at this time, and suggesting deliberate, possibly ritual, depositing. 10 barbarous radiates had been found at the site, and that these crude, cheap copies of official Roman coins, thought to have been used as small change when there was a shortage of low-value coins, have been associated with ritual deposits elsewhere in Britain.

The site was compared to a Romano-Celtic temple site at Lowbury Hill, about 20km away, and the two sites seen to have much in common. Thus, the Lowbury Hill temple was in an upland location, has no building remains, had a similar finds assemblage of valuable personal items and over 1,000 coins, with a peak of Reece period 19 (AD364-378) coins.

John showed us a selection of Roman coins and brooches, all dated from the 1st to the 4th centuries AD, suggesting the site was in use for a long period of time. A horse-and-rider type brooch (3rd to 4th century AD) drew comparisons with a medieval pilgrim's badge. The finding of a Roman hipposandal, an early horseshoe, not only suggested the presence of a horse at the site, but also implied the presence of metalled roads, for which hoof protection was needed.

The 'Berkshire Downs' site's association with the Roman army and/or a militarised elite was noted, with military-style brooches appearing throughout the Roman period. Late Roman military material, such as Hawkes and Dunning type belt buckles, were found, and compared to similar finds from burials and deposits elsewhere in Britain. Military artefacts, indicative of the military status of the owners, would have been a high-value ritual deposit.

The 'Berkshire Downs' site is important for what it shows of life in the Late Roman period. The finding of artefacts that had been repaired (a horse-headed buckle), a finger ring crudely formed from a cut-down bracelet, and clipped coins, all suggest a somewhat less-than-wealthy population. The valuable Late Roman military artefacts, and all the other metal offerings, deposited at what may have been a rather small upland shrine, appear to show people's fears and insecurities at this time. A small amount of metalwork from the Early Anglo-Saxon period (mid-5th to 6th centuries AD) has been found, including a brooch, a decorative mount and a spearhead, which may or may not have been accidental losses.

In conclusion, John pointed out that this was a significant new site on the Berkshire Downs, long-lived with about 500 years of continuous activity from the Late Iron Age to the Post-Roman period and was of particular importance for the information it gave about the end of Roman Britain.

Report by Joan Burrow-Newton

[Read the full report on the website](#)

Searching for Vikings on small Scottish islands

by Professor Steven Mithen 21st February 2026

Professor Steven Mithen started his talk by reminding us that the Vikings, as well as being raiders, were also traders, explorers and farmers.

Steve told us that here, in the southwest of England, people did not escape the raiders, with Danish Vikings arriving at Reading in 870, and making a winter camp there. However, they were defeated by the West Saxons at Englefield, near Reading; the first of many battles fought to keep the south free from the Viking invaders.

A map showed the presence of the Vikings in Scotland, from 800 to 1014, and displayed the many monasteries and settlements raided, sometimes repeatedly, by the Vikings. Iona Abbey, founded by the Irish monk St Columba in 563, was one such place.

We saw an excavated warrior's boat burial from Westness cemetery on Rousay, Orkney. On the Isle of Colonsay was a boat burial that gave evidence of the Vikings as traders, in the form of a set of scales and elaborately decorated weights.

On a map of the Isle of Islay, off the west coast of Scotland, we saw where three Viking burial sites had been found. We looked at a Viking cemetery at Ballinaby, and at grave goods found there. A pair of 'tortoise brooches', a ladle and a polishing stone (used for pressing linen), indicated a female burial, while swords and other weapons suggested male burials.

Steve discussed the lack of evidence for Viking settlements on Islay. 40% of Islay place names derive from Old Norse, suggesting widespread Viking settlement. However, no Viking houses have yet been found. Steve thinks that the Vikings may have just used Islay for burials, allowing the islanders, the Ilich, to continue to live there, and to gradually adopt Viking place names.

On Islay are the remains of medieval buildings at Olistadh, which in Old Norse means 'Olaf's Farm', suggesting a 12th century Norse farmstead, or possibly an earlier Viking settlement. The settlement at Olistadh was first documented in the crown rentals of 1541, with the last tenant leaving in 1851, when the landowner wanted to use Olistadh for sheep farming.

In 2024, Steve and a team from the University of Reading went to Olistadh, to find evidence of Viking buildings. In Trench 2, there was great excitement when a turf wall, as used by the Vikings to build their houses, was revealed, but sadly it turned out to be part of a 17th century corn drying kiln. The area had been so heavily developed, that any Viking remains, had they ever existed, would likely have been destroyed.

On Nave Island medieval and post-medieval development was not so concentrated. Here, at Port na h-Eaglais, there is an enclosure that is thought to have been a monastic outpost from Iona. There is a 13th/14th century chapel and an intriguing oval-shaped structure.

In 1961, this was recorded as 'an oval mound', 18m in length and 8.2m wide, with stones visible near the

centre and at one end. In the 1970s, it was Scheduled as a 'Viking house'. In 1978, as part of Ordnance Survey mapping, it was described as a 'boat-shaped building'. In 1999, the structure was described as a 'barrel-shaped house with turf walls', somewhat confusingly, as other visitors had noted stone walling.

Wondering if the oval-shaped structure could be a Viking ship burial, we looked at the excavated Viking ship burial at Balladoole on the Isle of Man, which was similarly sited near a Christian chapel.

In March 2022, Steve and a team from the University of Reading, had been allowed just one day to do a topographic and geophysical survey of the mound. The structure, now accurately measured, was seen to be earlier than post-medieval farming, as rig and furrow plough marks avoided it.

In August 2024, Steve and the team were allowed, by Historic Environment Scotland (HES), one week for a small-scale excavation of the oval-shaped mound, but only 'down to archaeologically significant layers'.

In Trench 1 the curved wall of the structure was seen to have large blocks on the inner and outer faces, and a rubble core. A George V (1911-1936) penny was found in an upper layer. A human burial, and an unusual, possibly deliberately buried tree trunk, were only partially excavated due to the HES restriction.

A human cranium and scapula had to be left in situ, but fragments of human bone and a tooth found nearby indicated a single adult burial. A phalanx (finger bone) had bone growth which suggested repetitive action (like rowing), and generative changes in vertebrae fragments found, also suggested a lifetime of vigorous activity.

In another part of Trench 1, a buried log; too large to have grown on Islay and thought likely to be driftwood, was associated with large stone slabs, and had a black crust on one end. Chemical tests have failed to reveal the identity of the black substance. One suggestion was that it could be tar, used to waterproof wooden boats, with the log having been used to raise up the boat to facilitate this process.

In Trench 2, the surrounding wall continued, there was an interior mound of stones built on a pebble substrate, and another human burial was found. As before, the cranium was left in situ, but fragments of bone and one tooth suggested another single burial.

For Steve, the current evidence points to the Vikings over-wintering and repairing their boats at this safe, isolated location, with, inevitably, people dying, who were then respectfully buried.

An application has been made for radiocarbon dating, and Steve and the Team intend to return to Nave Island in 2027.

Report by Joan Burrow-Newton

[Read the full report on the website](#)

Wickham House Excavation Project Update

Post-excavation analysis to refine the stratigraphic analyses of the 8 trenches excavated to develop initial interpretations of the archaeology revealed took place by 4 groups involving 15 BAS members. The results of this analysis were reported in plenary at the Study Group on 11th March and recommendation incorporated into the 2026 (season 2) excavation plan.

L1 and L2 pottery analysis have completed with initial L3 dating having been undertaken to provide sufficient information for the first iteration of phasing within the interim report that is now being drafted for season 1. TVAS have very kindly offered to undertake a comprehensive analysis of the Season 1 Roman pottery assemblage to provide not only provide more accurate dating and identification of vessel form, but to serve as a reference collection for future work on this site and other Roman period sites nearby. The small Medieval pottery assemblage will be passed to a 3rd party specialist for assessment in due course.

Specialist reports have now been drafted for Glass (Peter Clifford), Animal Bone (Paula Levick), CBM (Jo Skerry), Coins (Lindsey Bedford), Iron Slag (Peter Clifford), Clay Pipe (Geoff Anderson) and Worked Flint (Fay Heblich). Other specialist reports are in the process of being completed. A comprehensive stratigraphic narrative for the season 1 excavation is also well underway to form the basis for an interim report.

As you will have heard BAS is about to start a second season of excavation at Wickham to explore the archaeology of a Romano-British roadside settlement. Post excavation of last year's excavation is telling us, from pottery, coins and other artefacts recovered, that this settlement was established during the early Roman period and likely fell into disuse before a second phase of occupation during the Late Roman period. There is no evidence so far of continued occupation of this site into the Early Medieval period, but in the late-12th century AD a medieval manor house was built on top of the Roman road. Not only is there evidence of domestic occupation, but there is also much evidence of industrial activity taking place nearby. The objectives for this season are focused on shedding new light on the Roman period roadside buildings that are emerging as well as the Medieval manor house.

Work on site starts on 31st March 2026, and an evening lecture/site tour will be scheduled for June together with an opportunity to visit the sites on 14th June as part of the Wickham House Open Day event. Further details of these two events will be circulated to BAS members in due course.

Keith Abbott

The BAS Study Group

The December 2025 meeting of the Study Group reviewed the functionality to be provided in release 2 of the Anchurus II system. The second half of the meeting

was a presentation by Keith Abbott on Wickham Stratigraphic Analysis

The January 2026 meeting was devoted to a *Review and Discussion of BAS GIS Projects* organised by Keith Abbott. This presentation included maps from several projects including the Roman project across Northeast Berkshire, Keith's PhD project: Reassessing the distribution, morphology, function and impact of *cursus publicus* infrastructure across Roman Britain, the Berkshire Romans Project 2 and the BAS gazetteer. The meeting closed with a discussion of the Society's need for agreed working practices to record reusable maps in shape files.

The February meeting was devoted to Stratigraphic analysis. It started with a presentation by Keith Abbott of the Wickham excavation during which he explained how he converted the stratigraphy of contexts into sets, groups and phases of use of the site. It was followed by a presentation by Andrew Hutt on the stratigraphic matrices for trenches, groups and phases found in the Blounts Court excavation.

The March meeting was devoted to a presentation of the Wickham 2026 excavation plans. The presentation was prepared by Keith Abbott but actually presented by James Peddle. The presentation started with a summary of the 2025 Wickham excavations and included presentations by Jill Oseman, Tim Lloyd and Philip Rawston

It ended by identifying the 2 main trenches they are planning to excavation from April to June 2026.

Note on terminology:

- **Phase:** a phase of use of a site. A phase has one or more groups
- **Group:** a feature or area of a site with a distinct period of activity. A group has one or more sets
- **Set** (also known as a subgroup): is a set of contexts in a trench which represents a feature or an activity. A set has one or more contexts
- **Context:** the lowest record of an excavation

Andrew Hutt

The BAS Finds Group

The December meeting of the Finds group was devoted to processing pottery. On one side of the room Keith has a team who laid out some of the Wickham pottery and gathered it into different pottery groups. On the other side of the room, another team was working on two pottery groups of the Blounts Court pottery.

The January meeting started with a presentation on Interpreting an excavation. It shows that dating is an iterative process involving a top-down process using the results of stratigraphic analysis (phases, groups, sets and contexts) and a bottom-up process involving findgroups, finds and contexts (see figure 1)

The bottom-up starts by identifying findgroups; groups of finds that were produced at the same location and /or in the same time period. These findgroup production date periods are assigned to all the finds in a findgroup. The next step is to date contexts. Each context has a list of finds of different materials some of which are dated. These date periods are then aggregated to assign a date period for the context.

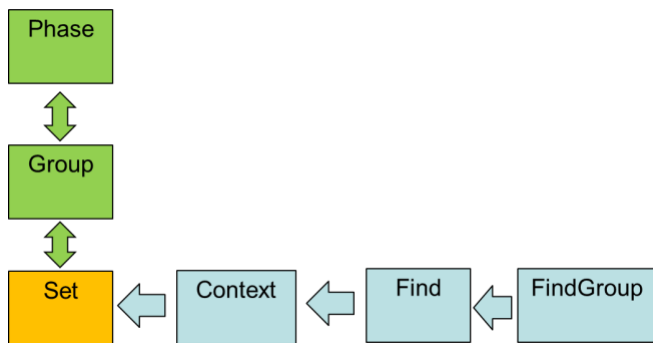


Figure 1: Dating an archaeological excavation

The February meeting was a continuation of the January meeting with a discussion on dating.

The March meeting started with a presentation by Andrew Hutt on the use of object analysis as a method of developing type hierarchies for finds and hence identifying find groups. One of the benefits of this approach is that it allows the Society to develop site independent hierarchies which will inform the development of reference collections (see nail type hierarchy below).

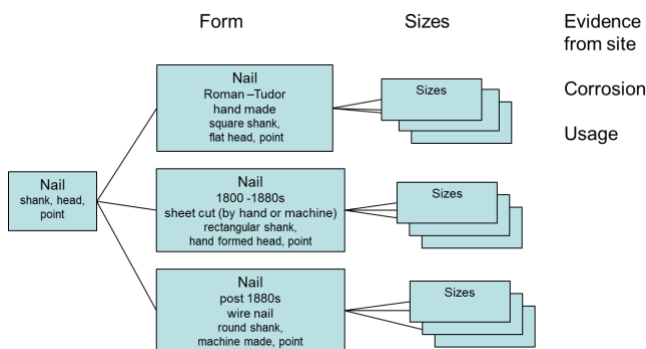
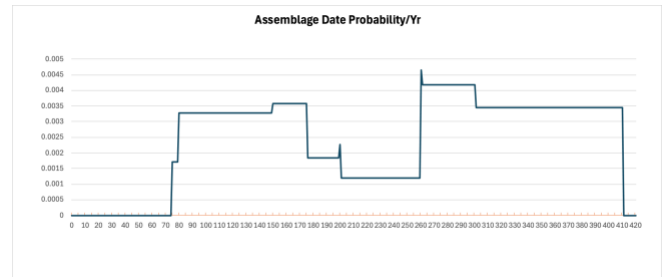


Figure 2: Type hierarchy for nails

This was followed by a presentation by Martin Labram of an algorithm for calculating the relative frequency date of the finds in a context. The main benefit of this algorithm is that it gives you a graph showing the date periods you can assign to a context based on the date periods inherited by finds from the findgroup production dates. The figure below shows a typical graph.

This algorithm can also be used to aggregate dates from the contexts in a set, a group or a phase.

The meeting agreed that the next step was to use the algorithm to date a range of different contexts, sets, groups and phases to see how useful it was in practice.



The March meeting concluded with a demonstration of the Anchurus II web application which we expect to use to record all the above in databases for the Blounts Court and Wickham excavations.

Finds Group Meetings in April, May and June 2026. These meetings have been cancelled because most people are involved in Wickham excavations. The next meeting is in September 2026.

Andrew Hutt

Blounts Court post-excavation

The work on Blounts Court post excavation is progressing. Work on the archaeological report has reached the point where the early chapters: describing the site and the geophysics survey are complete. Tim and I are working on a presentable site plan for the trenches so this chapter can be completed. The stratigraphic analysis is being written up. The most interesting feature that has been found during this work was a possible Roman/medieval floor.

The find reports for pottery, clay pipe and glass are complete and Nigel and I have started to rework nails. There is still a lot to do here including peg tile, brick, worked stone, and animal bones so I would appreciate some help.

If you fancy working on any of these please let me know.

Andrew Hutt

Anchurus II

Anchurus II is the system being developed by the Society to record and interpret archaeological sites. Parts of this system are already in use. Society members have been using the shared file store, drawing stratigraphic matrices using Draw IO and plans using QGIS.

As of 24th March 2026, the Anchurus II web application is nearly complete and is being tested. This gives Tony and me credible measures to assess how the development is progressing. We would welcome help with the testing. You will be given a script in PowerPoint, a demonstration and instructions on how to use it and to record your findings in the same document.

Over the last months, the data used to record the Wickham and Blounts Court post excavation work has diverged so Martin and I are working to develop a single coherent database definition.

I now have an overview of the user manual for this system. It will be presented on the Anchurus website and is likely to consist of some 20 web pages. Some of

the pages have already been written but there is more to do.

If you fancy working on any of this, please let me know.

Andrew Hutt

Subscriptions

I am pleased to report that BAS now has a Bank Account with Lloyds Bank with the usual means of payment available, that is by Bank payment, Standing Order, cash or cheque as before. Note that the Society does not do Direct Debit.

Subscriptions for the season 2026-27 are now due and I would be pleased if you could make your payment, when convenient for you, sometime during April. If you have already subscribed for 2026 then please do not pay again! Subscriptions are £20 for an individual and £25 for a couple or family at the same address. If your contact details have not changed there is no need to complete a renewal form, but if you have changed your address, email or phone number please let me know. Thank you for your patience over the last couple of months while the account was sorted out.

Bank account details

Account Name **Berkshire Archaeological Society**

Account Number **80820960**

Sort Code **30-54-66**

Reference **Your name**

Cash or cheques may be given to me or James Peddle in person at a meeting or cheques may be sent to me at **2 Murdoch Road, Wokingham, Berks, RG40 2DA.**

If you would like to set up a Standing Order then please make it an annual payment to be paid in April at a date that is convenient for you. Please also ensure that any former SOs payable to BAS are cancelled.

Anne Harrison

Other Local Societies

See the links below for details of their activities:

[Berkshire Archaeology Research Group](#)

[Maidenhead Archaeological and Historical Society](#)

[Marlow Archaeology Group](#)

[South Oxfordshire Archaeological Group](#)

[Thames Valley Ancient Egypt Society](#)

The copy date for the next issue of this newsletter is 27th May 2026. Please send any articles to

newsletter@berksarch.co.uk

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
chair@berksarch.co.uk

Secretary: Keith Abbott
secretary@berksarch.co.uk

Treasurer: James Peddle
treasurer@berksarch.co.uk

Membership Secretary:
Anne Harrison
membership@berksarch.co.uk

Lectures & visits:
Jean Curran
lectures@berksarch.co.uk

Day Schools:
Peter Clifford
peter.clifford@berksarch.co.uk

Study Group & Field Projects:
Andrew Hutt
projects@berksarch.co.uk

Newsletter: Tim Lloyd
newsletter@berksarch.co.uk

Website: Tim Lloyd
webmaster@berksarch.co.uk

For more contacts and more information about the Society visit:
www.berksarch.co.uk