

THE RESULTS OF THE MEMBERS' SURVEY OF AUTUMN 2011 ...AND HOW THE SOCIETY MIGHT RESPOND

Report by Peter Marsden, Chair of BAS Council

A survey form was circulated by post to all 400 members of the Society in October 2011. It had two aims. The first was to find which of the Society's activities were most valued by members, and how the Society might improve its response to members' interests and concerns. The second was to discover whether the Society could improve its communications with members by using eMail.

Of the 400 forms distributed, 220 were returned completed. This is 55 per cent. Marketing people will tell you that this is a good response level.

Here are the results:

1: Most Valued Activities

Members were asked 'What BAS activities are of most value to you as a member?' - and were asked to respond by giving the activities of the Society points ranging from 5, for 'most valued', to zero for 'not valued at all'.

The results showed that the annual publication of 'Records of Buckinghamshire' is by far the Society's most highly valued activity, with 929 points. Here are the full results in order:

Records of Bucks	929
Library and archives	599
Other publications	465
Afternoon lectures	397
Summer outings	390
Historic Buildings Group	361
Natural History	283

- Several members mentioned how much they valued the BAS Newsletter.
- The BLHN Conference was omitted (this was my error), so several members added it themselves. The conference's value, however, is attested by the several hundred people – both BAS members and others – who attend it every Autumn.

HOW THE SOCIETY CAN RESPOND:

There are no real surprises here. A clear pat on the back for Records of Bucks and the Library, but with recognition for all of the Society's activities. The results were discussed at BASS Council in January, where it was noted that 'Other publications' also scored highly, even though there had been only one (the Illustrated History of Buckinghamshire) since 2009. Is the Society 'underplaying' its other publications?

Council agreed to convene a 'Publications Group' to look at opportunities and to liaise with the County Museum on possible joint publications. Two 'Bucks Papers' are also planned for 2012: on Isaac Disraeli in Spring and Straw-plaiting in Autumn.

2: Areas of Interest

Members were asked 'What are your main areas of interest?' and, again, gave these points ranging from 5 to zero. The results were:

History	903
Archaeology	809
Architecture	598
Family history	508
Natural history	367

3: Membership of other local societies

The survey also asked 'Are you an active member of any local history societies? If so which?'

The highest scorers were:

• Bucks Family History Society	17
• Bucks Record Society	9
• Chess Valley Archaeology and History Society	8
• The Chiltern Society	5
• Bucks Garden Trust	5
• The Marlow Society	5
• Weston Turville History Society	5
• Archaeology in Marlow	5
• Wolverton District Archaeology and History Society	5
• Bucks, Beds and Oxon Wildlife Trust	5

...and 45 other local societies with fewer than five.

HOW THE SOCIETY CAN RESPOND:

Again no surprises, but should Records of Bucks reflect the interest in Family History more?

4: Suggested activities that the society might organise

Members were asked 'Are there other activities you would like the Society to organise?'

- **Archaeological investigations** were most mentioned (13):
 - 'Access to digs'
 - 'Visits to active digs... organise digs volunteers'
 - 'Non-intrusive active fieldwork – woodland survey, earthwork survey, geophysics, fieldwalking'
 - 'Visits to archaeological excavations... would need eMail list to organise at short notice through county service/field units'
 - 'Another visit to Quarrendon'
 - 'Outings with an archaeological flavour, not just buildings'
 - 'Visits to observe local digs'
 - 'Excavation'
 - 'The society really needs an active field group to attract younger members (as Kent and Sussex for example); might the society keep a register of members looking for fieldwork opportunities?'

'An active archaeology group'

'Organise or sponsor some field archaeology that members (or Bucks CC) would like to undertake, giving members the opportunity to learn in the field'

'Identifying archaeological sites, learning to dig and explore'

'The Quarrendon day, 2009, was brilliant'

- The popularity of **Outings** (5) was evident:
 - 'More guided walks around villages etc'
 - 'More outings (any season), especially local sites for 'walk and talk' with experts (professional and lay)'
 - 'Photographic days out to capture history for the future'
 - 'More visits to historic properties and houses within Bucks'
 - 'More outings, for example historic buildings'
- There were some specific ideas for **Workshops** (4)
 - 'Workshops on medieval pottery from excavation in Bucks, and lithic analysis'
 - 'Symposia on a proactive strategy for the long-term sustenance of the Bucks environment and cultural heritage'
 - 'One-off training courses such as the one on using old maps for research... on, for example, identifying worked flint and pottery'
 - 'Local day schools, conferences'
 - 'Perhaps more sharing or talks of other members' specialities to provide a basic grounding for others'
- There were suggestions for improved **Communications** (2):
 - 'eMail notification of events of interest'
 - 'Outreach to local and neighbouring societies'
- The **location of events** raised concern – but this was not consistent; for example:
 - 'Hold the annual BLHN Conference in Aylesbury'
 - 'More events outside Aylesbury'
- And a few people raised other concerns:
 - 'Aylesbury Museum must be safeguarded'
 - 'The society's activities seem to me comprehensive... The issue is finding people to organise them'
 - 'I am concerned about the age profile of membership. Activities that encourage participation by people under 40 would help guarantee the future stability of the society'

HOW THE SOCIETY CAN RESPOND:

The big surprise here is the clear request from members for more active involvement in archaeology. BAS Council discussed this at some length at its January meeting. The science of archaeological investigation has advanced hugely since the days when, 150 years ago, early members of the Society simply went out with pick and shovel and started digging.

The majority opinion was that the Society should be careful not to encourage uninformed excavation, which might in fact damage the county's historic assets. However the Society does exist to increase understanding of the archaeology of Buckinghamshire so could respond with talks and workshops.

4: Offers and requests for the coverage of particular subjects in BAS publications

Forty-one members mentioned particular subjects that they would like to see covered in the Society's publications. Here is the list in alphabetical order:

Amplification of each of the chapters in 'An Illustrated History of Early Buckinghamshire'

Bradenham Woods Survey

Bucks at Domesday

Bucks churches and monastic houses

Bucks Cromwellian figures: John Wilkes, libertarians, secularists

Bucks parks and gardens

Bucks settlement patterns

Chesham Manorial Records

Development of Milton Keynes

Dovecotes and fishponds 1450-on

Earls of Shelburne and Wycome Abbey

Evolution of the highway network

Flint Buildings in Bucks

Forms of lease 1400-2000

Heraldry in Bucks churches

Historical Atlas of Bucks (3)

History of Aylesbury

History of Kings' Wood, Tyler's Green

History of Linslade

History of occupants and house at Raddie Manor

History of Stowe

History of the Rocket Motors Establishment at Westcott

Industrial archaeology in Bucks

Landscape history of Bucks (2)

Local coinage

Manor houses in Bucks

Manor of Chalfont St Peter

Medieval Seals

More publications like the Jeffreys and Bryant map volume

Old Aylesbury

Overview of World War I and World War II archaeology in Bucks

Oxbridge college livings – especially New College

Parish councils' running costs

Rent levels in Bucks 1400-on

Roman Hambledon

Saxon/medieval deer park in Penn

Stowe New Inn

Timber frames

Tithe Map Project

Transhumance – winter valleys to summer pastures and woodland

Winslow

Wood carvings

Wycombe Heath as a hunting chase for Citizens of London

- There were also many requests for articles or publications on particular towns and villages (for example 'More on High Wycombe') and for general subject areas ('Natural history, especially wild flowers').

HOW THE SOCIETY CAN RESPOND:

The list – including the names of members who are offering articles - has been passed to the editors of both Records of Bucks and Bucks Papers.

5: Members' active research interests

Members were asked 'Do you have active areas of research or excavation? If so, what are they?'
The responses again show the wide range of members' interests:

17th-century Bucks Quakers
 19th-century Bucks
 19th-century Bucks photographers
 19th-century social history
 Anglo-Saxon churches
 Archaeology of Weston Turville
 Artefacts
 Ashridge
 Ashridge: The College of Bonhommes
 Aylesbury
 Bletchley Park
 Bucks churches
 Bucks in the Civil War
 Chalfont St Peter Manor
 Cheddington airfield
 Chesham Bois Manor
 Chesham manorial records
 Church Houses
 Church recording
 Cottage crafts and cooking
 Evolution of the highway system
 Furniture history
 Haddenham
 Haddenham: Historic buildings
 Hanslope
 Hartwell House
 Hedgerley historic buildings survey
 Heraldry in Bucks churches
 Industrial archaeology
 Iver
 Life of George Lipscomb
 Lord Desborough
 Marlow
 Marlow's Warren Wood
 Medieval buildings
 Medieval settlements

Newport Pagnell
Penn Tiles
Piddington Romano-British site
Prestwood in the early modern period
Printing in Bucks
Quarrendon Leys
Roman Hambledon
Roman roads
Social status and pew rents: church seating in Bucks
Stone
Stone, Hartwell and Dinton
Stowe
Upper Great Ouse Valley
Village history
War memorials
Wendover Wills
Weston Turville
Wingrave
Winslow
Wycombe and Disraeli

HOW THE SOCIETY CAN RESPOND:

Members' names have been removed from this list, because the survey did not ask members' permission to publish this information. However there are benefits in knowing who in the Society is researching what: encouraging cooperation on one side and avoiding duplication on the other. Perhaps a register of members' research interests could be kept in the BAS Library?

6: eMail communication

Members were asked 'Do you have access to eMail? Could we add you to the BAS eMail List?' The responses added 131 members' eMail addresses to the Society's eMail list, bringing the total to 230. This is 57 per cent of the membership.

HOW THE SOCIETY CAN RESPOND:

There are clear advantages in using eMail, both for members and for the Society. Members would receive information about Society activities faster and earlier. The Society would save money on printing and postage. But how can the Society achieve these benefits without disadvantaging the 43 per cent of members who do not have access to eMail?

BAS Council discussed this issue at both its January and March meetings. Council agreed that if eMail is used to send out new and time-sensitive information, then this must be accompanied by a postal mailing to members not on the eMail list. If the information is not time-sensitive, it could instead be published in the next BAS Newsletter. The principle, however, must be to ensure that all members are kept informed.