

Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society

NEWSLETTER – Spring 2016

Active Archaeology Group

Winter tends to be a quieter time for fieldwork – but the dismal weather has produced only a few restrictions – we still justify the term Active, and our membership remains strong, although some members are mainly interested in talks.

In no particular order, more details of what we have been doing are below.

Hogshaw

We have permission to continue with the geophysics on this site, but are waiting for the ground to dry out a little in order to get good results.

A small group is working on an exhibition which will shortly be on display in the Museum. This will show our results so far – geophysics and surveys, plus our research into the stone, metal and pottery finds which the landowner has made over several years. We have pieces of carved stone which appear to be ecclesiastical in origin, and pottery which is nearly all of the period when the site was active – 12th and 13th Centuries (mostly domestic, and including Brill/Boarstall ware, some St Neots Ware and grey shelly ware) We have information about the Knights Hospitallers who originally held the site, and some of their other sites and activities. As the site is called Ox House Farm we have also looked at the use of oxen, and how they were shod. Look out for the exhibition to learn more.

Cliveden

Six members spent two days clearing a vast amount of debris from the old generator house at Cliveden, at the request of Gary Marshall (NT archaeologist). We found lots of evidence of the old accumulator cells and while clearing flywheel pits in the floor we found many marble fragments, which had formed the backing of a large switchboard (some of the electrical wiring and switches were still attached). We tried to fit the pieces together, but in the time available were not able to complete the jigsaw with no picture! Gary is probably still trying. The plan is, eventually, to use the building as an educational centre.

And we got free lunches.

Hobbs Hill

Stuart King drew our attention to this site near Monks Risborough, which is previously unrecorded. There is a curvilinear earthwork with an associated ditch on the top of a hill. A large group of our



members (about 23) began surveying it in October and a smaller number returned on a very windy day at the end of November; with a final effort later. The survey has been completed and we are now looking at the possibility of a trial trench, with archaeological supervision, in the hope of finding dating evidence and perhaps clues as to what it was. It is not a hillfort, but seems to fit into the Iron Age landscape of the area, and is therefore generating interest from the Hillfort Survey Group, and the Hillfort Survey form has been submitted.

Members of the Archaeology Group during the earthworks survey at Hobbs Hill

Cholesbury

We, members of the Chess Valley group (with their resistivity meter), and Kris Lockyear of UC L plus some of his volunteers and his Magnetometer, and Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) machine converged on a field adjacent to the Cholesbury hillfort, where the owners were curious about some ephemeral marks they had noticed on the grass. The marks take a rectangular form suggestive of a building, but only appear when there is a light frost, disappearing as the frost melts. Unfortunately, we failed to see the marks, and our efforts turned up very little in the field. We learned that the magnetometer shows up molehills very well – not much help as we could see them anyway.



Members of the Archaeology Group running geophysical surveys at Cholesbury

It was an interesting experience and the landowners were very hospitable.

8th in the East

This is a Heritage Lottery funded project aiming to record as many as possible of the 'temporary' buildings still standing on airfields throughout East Anglia used by the USAAF during WWII – some 80 sites in all. Martin Cuthbert ran a training day for members of the AAG, Wing Heritage, LBDHHS, Cheddington History Society and Bovingdon History Society. We spent the morning learning what to do, then a very windy afternoon trying to practise our new skills around two sites on Wing airfield. We had no idea there were so many variants on a Nissen hut – or so many different and named types of air raid shelter. We also discovered that recording is best done in the winter as the nettles and brambles are not so high

Cheddington History Society recently had a talk by one of the project leaders about what the Americans were actually doing there. Unfortunately, it seems that Cheddington will not be recorded as it has proved impossible to get permission for access to the buildings. Bovingdon also seems unlikely to be recorded, as no-one there has been able to organise a session.

Wing, however, continues (the only one not actually covered by the project since it is wholly within Bucks, but our results can still be submitted to the HER). Four of us spent a very cold, wet and muddy Saturday morning on public footpaths trying to work out where there are buildings we need to record in order to then approach the landowners for permission. We already have permission to record some buildings but we need access to others. There are sessions already planned, and some of the Cheddington people may now decide to help with Wing.

Wing Heritage

The original three year plan to look for the Saxon village has now finished. Our finds suggest the settlement may have been mainly around the church and the 'Castle Mound', although recent predevelopment work on the old allotment site, not far away, has also yielded Saxon finds. The mound is scheduled – but the field around it is not, and we hope to do some geophysics there when the weather is a little better, possibly followed by digging if the results warrant it.

We have a few more test pits still to do, but most work this year will be on the edges of the village.

Wing Heritage put on a display at the Milton Keynes Archaeology day, and will also have one at the CBA South Midlands Spring Conference.

Ashridge/Northchurch Common

Gary Marshall (NT archaeologist) asked the AAG to help with recording the remains of WWI practice trenches on Northchurch Common. Filled in about 1919, they remain only as shallow dips in the ground, but cover an extensive area. Several AAG members helped other volunteers on a particularly awful day in January (rain eventually stopped play just after lunch), with a second much more pleasant session in February, completing the work Gary wanted for the time being.

Boarstall Duck Decoy

At least one person went to the duck decoy to help bind prunings from the bushes around the decoy into 'faggots' which will be used later in the year to help shore up the banks of some of the water features at Stowe Gardens – another job for the AAG. Gary has also asked us back to help with surveying some of the earthworks on the site, currently planned for March 11th.

We are struck by Gary's ability to find wet and dirty sites for us to help with!

Buckland Wood

This is a private woodland nowhere near Buckland village. The landowner has spent a lot of time clearing holly from beneath the trees and has come upon some earthworks that seem to be unrecorded (they had not been seen for a good many years because of the undergrowth). He wondered what they were, and we were invited to look at them. We have so far spent a chilly Sunday morning, under Mike Farley's supervision, examining them. We do not know exactly what they are, and they are not very prominent, but as they are unrecorded, we plan to survey them when the weather is a little kinder.

Chess Valley Excavations at Penn

The Chess Valley group invited us to join them for the day on 18th Feb. Two of our members already work with Chess Valley, and four more visited. Some ten years ago Chess Valley excavated close by and found a Romano-British enclosure, with evidence of iron smelting. The current excavation is of a smaller, possibly older enclosure, which has so far yielded only iron slag. The site is similar to the Buckland Wood site, but more heavily overgrown.

Winter Programme of Talks

This started in September, and is now nearly complete. We have been updated on the predevelopment excavations at Aston Clinton, where there was a lot of evidence of early activity including an Iron Age roundhouse; Maids Moreton – lots of 12th and 13th Century pottery, but no real conclusions; Ashridge House – evidence of the old monastic buildings; Warren Wood Little Marlow; some examples of the bone collection that the Museum holds (which three of our members have been helping to catalogue), and the Portable Antiquities Scheme (we managed to grab Ros Tyrrell just before she retires). The remaining talks are Buckinghamshire Pots, Potters, and Potteries on 15th March and the Saxon burials at Hockliffe (excavated by LBDHHS in summer 2015) on 19th April. Everyone is welcome at these meetings

CBA South Midlands

We were asked if we could supply someone to join the Regional Committee to represent amateur archaeology in Bucks. Most of the meetings are in Milton Keynes, and as the person living nearest, Pauline agreed to take this on. There has been only one meeting since she joined.

Pauline Hey