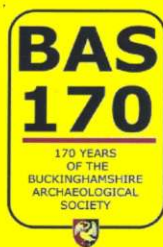


Archaeological Investigations and HS2



What we don't know and what we do know.

Some people may feel that the heading above right ought to be the other way round but unfortunately this is not the case! It may be that the answers to a recent enquiry of HS2 will have changed the position completely by the time this note appears in the Newsletter – here's hoping!

In late November we learnt (indirectly) that Mr. J Carver, the lead archaeologist with Fusion the contractors dealing with 'enabling works' in Buckinghamshire, would be speaking at an evening parish meeting on the subject of investigations at the Stoke Mandeville old church site. Mr Carver told the meeting that seventy or so archaeological sites might be investigated on the line as a whole. His priority was to arrange for completion of geophysical survey on the line. In the case of Stoke Mandeville, the church and cemetery site itself would be dealt with after investigations in its immediate vicinity had been concluded (two such were underway and other trial-trenching is planned). On the church site itself the priority would be a survey of features in the interior and an assessment of the mound of stone within which the church footings remain. It was intended that investigations of the core area would commence in the summer the summer of 2018

Since the parish council ceased to maintain the site as an amenity it has become overgrown and nesting birds will provide one constraint on works. Mr Carver was not in a position to answer questions about the permanent storage of the gravestones, architectural fragments, or the human remains. Some will recall that the society has proposed the creation of a Stoke Mandeville Legacy Garden for 'storage' which could also be developed as a local amenity but it appears that no progress has been made by HS2 as a whole with the storage issue for the substantial volume of 'finds' which will arise from excavations on the line.

The society learnt indirectly (from landowners and others, but not HS2) that trial-trenching has been undertaken near the Roman small town of Fleet Marston



Gravestones, Stoke Mandeville Old Church

(which geophysical survey has shown to be surprisingly extensive) and at the Roman and medieval site at Doddershall. Casual visitors are not currently welcome on any site being investigated on grounds of Health and Safety (industry construction rules are being applied) but after briefing, two of us were invited to visit Doddershall and shown some of the finds. We sympathised with the site workers as most trenches were waterlogged.

So far it is preliminary investigations that are being carried out on the line. It is understood that archaeological contractors for the main investigations will shortly be appointed. These are likely to be consortia of known contracting bodies. HS2 has a commitment to 'community engagement. It is to be hoped that once these contractors are in place, it will become possible for the society to be regularly informed about work in hand and to play some active role in the ongoing process. Otherwise we will have to wait patiently for six months until 29th September when (we hope) this year BLHN conference will be devoted to HS2.

Mike Farley