

Active Archeology Group Report, August 2016

We have continued to justify our 'Active' name. As well as the activities detailed below, some of our members also work with other archaeological societies, particularly the Chess Valley Society and the Berkhamsted group, as well as Kris Lockyear's geosurvey group. Details of what these groups have been doing are not always immediately available, but can be found on their respective websites.



Using the Disto at Bradenham Wood

Surveying of earthworks has been greatly helped by BAS's purchase for us of a Disto (a very accurate laser measuring device, which obviates the need for tapes – a huge bonus in woodland sites). Thanks are due to Mike Farley for recommending the device.

Hogshaw

Further geophysical surveying was done in early June, though we do not yet have the results. This should complete the evidence we can collect to make a case to HE to allow us to put in two, or perhaps three trenches with a view to locating some of the Knights Hospitaller buildings that have now disappeared.

We also put up a display in the Museum about what we have so far done on the site, and the associated research. Preparing the display consolidated our knowledge, and it seems to have been well received.

Hobbs Hill



Work in trench at Hobbs Hill

This is currently our most active site. As reported previously, there is a curvilinear earthwork around part of a heavily wooded promontory. The earthworks consist of a ditch and bank, around the part with the steepest slope. It cannot really be defensive since there is higher land nearby (fire arrows would be deadly). With help from Chess Valley, (particularly Yvonne Edwards) we have put three trenches across the ditch. Trench 1 initially found what might be the remains of a Victorian picnic, and now has both sides of a ditch which appears to be curving around the edge of the promontory. The bottom of the

ditch has not yet been reached. Trench 2 has both sides of the ditch, and is largely empty, though it did come up with two nice pieces of decorated pottery provisionally dated to Iron Age, and has a suggestion that the ditch was recut at some time.

Trench 3 is largely complete – it has both sides of the ditch, and looks as though it has been recut at least once since there is a W profile. This trench produced several pieces of Iron Age pottery (with very fresh edges suggesting that they had not moved far). It has not yet quite reached the bottom of the ditch. A fourth trench across a depression which looked as if it might be a saw-pit proved inconclusive; there was no dating evidence, and it had a flat spongy base. Our best guess at the moment is that it may have been a WWI practice trench. Two trenches on the flat area on top of the



promontory have so far produced nothing of interest – though scraping the leaf mould away did result in more Iron Age pottery finds. Work is continuing, and we will write it up properly when complete.



Two finds of Iron Age pottery at Hobbs Hill

Woodland Survey

The owner wants as little publicity as possible, so I have not given the name of this site. After the (fairly new) owner cleared a lot of holly, an earthwork became apparent. As the owner had no idea what it might be, he asked us to investigate. We have surveyed the main earthwork which is a more or less oval enclosure with a ditch and bank, which vary from very clear to almost non-existent. There may be an annexe, but it is less than convincing, and there is a ditch, sometimes with a bank, around the perimeter of the wood, with several pits, possibly for clay extraction, and another, rather faint earthwork running across the site. We have completed what we were asked to do, but would like to put a trench or two in to clarify what we have found. This is yet to be discussed with the site owner.

Boarstall Duck Decoy

Before we had the Disto, a group spent an interesting day in March trying to survey this very wet (hardly surprising) site, which was also well supplied with brambles and other undergrowth. We sank in the mud and often found that having reached the point we needed for measuring, getting back out was close to impossible. A second visit completed the surveying Gary Marshall required, and we do not at present plan to return.

8th in the East

This project is nearing its end. It has achieved more in Essex and Suffolk, but in our area has had little success because of access difficulties – though Wing Heritage did manage to survey the old Gymnasium site, and locate a chapel which was not on the original plans.

Wing Heritage

There have been only three test pits so far this year. One was not in the preferred position, because Historic England (HE) had redrawn the map, and the site of the pit appeared to be within the scheduled area (HE has now agreed that there was a mistake and the area in question is not scheduled). That pit revealed only a few bits of pottery and a Royal Marines Light Infantry button. The second one – a revisit to a garden dug last year, revealed an area of burning – maybe a hearth, but possibly more extensive, suggesting industrial use, and a single post hole plus two Bucks Constabulary buttons (one was found in the same garden last year). The third pit was in the recreation ground – and produced almost nothing. The area had been surveyed by MOLA using a magnetometer which incorporates GPS. It located several ditches, but they were all in the football field where we were not allowed to dig. A display was produced at the CBA S Midlands Conference in April.

Geophysics around the Castle Mound has had to be postponed as the farmer has cattle in the field.

CBA South Midlands

Several members attended the Spring Conference, an excellent day devoted to Saxon archaeology. The autumn conference has a Roman theme. Pauline continues to represent amateur archaeology in Bucks at the Regional Committee (please tell her of anything that should be brought up at the meetings)

Pauline Hey