

# BAS Active Archaeology Group Report

Since our last report for the Autumn Newsletter, our activities have moved on. The weather through the winter has limited us to some extent, and what we have done has usually been cold, wet and muddy, but spring is coming.

Several projects require writing up properly - a small group will do this, then all involved with each project will have the opportunity to review/revise the reports before they are submitted to Records of Bucks.

## Hobbs Hill

This site is now closed at least for the winter, with all our trenches recorded and backfilled. Trench 1 caused us some difficulty - we were unable to determine where the bottom of the trench really was. Fortunately Yvonne Edwards, of Chess Valley came to our rescue. She felt that we had not fully understood some of the characteristics of the local chalk, and had therefore failed to recognise the bottom of the ditch, resulting in some over digging. There were no further finds in this trench.



Trench 2, which yielded two very nice pieces of decorated Iron Age pottery, and a possible reshaping of the base of the ditch at some time, was closed and backfilled early in the autumn. Trench 3, which produced several pieces of Iron Age pottery, also showed clearly that the ditch had been recut at some time, giving a W shape profile. We extended this one both uphill and downhill to get a full picture of the profile, and on the uphill side found a few small pieces of rather worn Iron Age pottery and a single piece of Samian ware. The profile seemed to follow the surface of the chalk, then dip quite steeply into the ditch, the cut surface showing a possible tool mark. At the limit of our digging the chalk surface was fairly level with a layer of soil and leaf mould on top. Trench 4 we believe to have been a WWI practice trench, at a short distance from the earthwork. Trenches 5 and 6, on the flat surface of the promontory, were placed, rather unscientifically, wherever we could find a big enough space among the trees and the forestry work. Neither yielded any finds (though there had been one or two bits of pottery on the surface) and reached solid chalk only about 15 to 20cm down. We may go back to try to trace what happens to the ditch further round the curve, but have not yet decided.



## Hogshaw

The last geophysics did suggest two parallel walls – but these are not on the same alignment as the thick walls noted during the watching brief, nor are they orientated to suggest being part of the church. We are planning to do further geophysics over two areas of this site. Both the above projects require writing up.

## Coleman's Wood

Stuart King continues to work on this very interesting multi-period site in most weeks. He will be describing his finds so far at our meeting on Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> April. We are also planning to do a measured survey of the earthworks in the interval between the weather starting to improve and the nettles etc. getting too tall – date not yet confirmed.

## Cheddington Airfield

Lack of access has prevented much activity here, but a small group has done a desk based search and endeavoured to walk round the periphery of the site – with some success. This also needs writing up.

## Cholesbury

A return visit to complete the geophysics which showed a semi-circular feature right at the edge of the survey is still planned, in order to further assess the feature, and this site will then need writing up.

## Wendover Arm of the Canal

The Wendover Arm of the canal was not very successful – it was intended as a source of water for the Grand Junction Canal (now the Grand Union) to compensate for the water lost in the flight of locks going over Tring summit, but it leaked badly and was abandoned not many years after its completion.

However, the Wendover Arm Trust has been working for some years to restore it, and there are stretches at each end which now have water in.

The AAG was invited to investigate and survey the White Houses site, as part of a new Heritage Lottery funding application by the Wendover Arm Trust. The site was a cottage and pump house from the early 1800s. It was abandoned in 1904 when the canal was closed, but re-opened in 1938 as a hostel for refugees (mainly Jewish) from Austria and Germany. It was also used as overnight accommodation for people avoiding the London bombing during WWII, and was eventually demolished in the 1950s.

Over three visits, the AAG team have revealed the foundations of the buildings, exposed a tiled floor, and surveyed and photographed the site ready to augment the Canal Trust's application for funds to complete the restoration work and turn the site into a public picnic area, incorporating information boards. If the funding is forthcoming, use of a small digger



to excavate (and back-fill) the basement would help to reveal any evidence of the original Newcomen steam pump.

## **Quarrendon and Field Walking**

The best laid schemes.....

It was originally planned that we would field walk a large field at Quarrendon which is just being returned to pasture after many years as arable, and which it will not be possible to field walk once it is pasture. Richard Gem arranged and led a walk around the remaining earthworks of the deserted medieval village and Tudor Manor to familiarise us with the site, which is a scheduled ancient monument, and still preserves much of the original layout. However, the field was not ploughed until later than expected so was not ready for field walking in February. It will be done in March or April.

Mike Farley searched for another field we could use, and eventually found one at Cuddington. It was not known to have any particular historical or archaeological significance, but was available. A small team, led by Mike, bravely laid out the squares for walking in some pretty awful weather on 11<sup>th</sup> February, ready to walk on the 12<sup>th</sup>. Unfortunately, due to the bad weather, we had to defer until Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> February, when about 15 people, including one child, and plus one dog, walked the field, collecting a lot of mud on their boots, and a variety of finds. These are awaiting washing and sorting, but include a lot of tile fragments, very little pottery, two horseshoes and a buckle, and three fragments of possibly worked flint. More detail may be available when they have been washed and sorted.

## **Bones**

A small group of our members continue to help sort and catalogue the human bones stored at the Halton site. They have made some interesting discoveries, and have been amazed by the excellent state of preservation of some of the oldest skeletons. They have also learned a lot.

## **Wing Heritage**

During the winter, there have been no test pits dug, but about 6 are planned during the coming summer – no dates confirmed yet. The group have run several very successful history walks around the village for local groups ranging from history societies to the WI.

## **Verulamium**

The team set up by Kris Lockyear to undertake the geophysics at Verulamium and other sites is now known as CAGG – Community Archaeology Geophysics Group. There are about 50 members who attend in varying numbers at the various sites where geophysics is needed. Several members of the AAG are also members of CAGG, and the group has helped with some of our sites.

With some UCL students in attendance, an area of Verulam Park was investigated with ground penetrating radar on 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Feb, as well as resistivity in a different area. It was planned to do magnetometry in the Abbey Orchard, but the machine suffered technical problems, and the attempt was abandoned. Further work is planned in a paddock behind

the museum at the end of March, and on the Gorehambury site in August. Results can be viewed on [herts.geosurvey.wordpress.com](http://herts.geosurvey.wordpress.com)

## **Other**

We have several other potential projects which are still at an early stage, so are not reported here. A number of our members also belong to other groups, particularly the Chess Valley group, and have been involved in their activities.

## **CBA South Midlands**

The Autumn Conference, with a Saxon theme was very interesting and well attended. The Spring Conference, on Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> April, at Haynes Village Hall near Bedford, will consist of talks about some of the work that has been going on in Bedfordshire. Pauline continues to represent amateur archaeology in Bucks at the regional committee – please tell her if there is anything you would like to be discussed there. They are able to give grants to amateur groups for various purposes.

### **AAG Talks Programme**

Our 2016/2017 programme is approaching its end. We still have three interesting talks planned:

Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> March - David Ingham - either Stratton (Saxon) or Romans in Bedfordshire

Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> April - Stuart King - Archaeology of Coleman's Wood. Celts, Romans and Medieval Mysteries

Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> May - John Boothroyd - Recent Discoveries near Thame - Neolithic to Saxon

We have the dates for the 2017/2018 programme, and are starting to approach potential speakers.

### **AAG Blog**

Further information about our activities is available on <http://basaag.blogspot.co.uk>

**Pauline Hey**