

HS2 ARCHAEOLOGY

The Positives and the Negatives

As members will know, your officers and others have held several meetings with HS2 staff or their representatives with the object of exploring 'community engagement' in whatever form, including possible involvement of BAS members in the process of research and/or investigation in the field. First the positives: there has already been some information flow about intended work at the Stoke Mandeville church site via local meetings, and on Sunday 9th September, there will be further local talks and access to the church site (where some may remember we held a public open-day).

See the following:

<https://www.heritageopendays.org.uk/visiting/event/exploring-st-marys-medieval-church-site-unearthing-history-and-discovering->

Secondly we can look forward to the BLHN/HS2 conference in Aylesbury on 29th September where HS2 archaeologists will be the key speakers.

Thirdly, AAG were pleased to have the opportunity to field walk a site at Stoke Mandeville identified by HS2 geophysical survey.

However - the negatives - although hundreds of trial trenches have now been dug across the county, the results of this work are not generally available, nor is there any transparency on decisions about future work at these sites. So far as site visits are concerned, only five members of the society have penetrated the ubiquitous security fencing to view work at two locations (photographs can't be promulgated). Site access is strictly controlled by Health and Safety requirements designed for major construction sites, not archaeological investigations. As this is the case, it seems unlikely that there will be opportunities for members to assist on site. Since HS2 are said to be having difficulties in recruiting enough archaeologists for the work, this seems self-defeating. One might have thought, that training courses could have been provided locally for potential volunteers to get over the Health and Safety hurdle. Instead, there will be the occasional set-piece open days for the public once large-scale investigations commence.

The society had pressed for retention of the human remains from the Stoke Mandeville church and cemetery site to be accessible above ground in order to provide opportunities in the long-term future for potential research. These human remains would have provided a unique opportunity for potential future study of the population of an entire parish dating back to the twelfth century or earlier (Instead we understand that the remains will be re-interred in a cemetery in the parish. No decision has been reached about display or storage of architectural remains and tombstones from the old church site.

Michael Farley