

CELEBRATING 170 YEARS OF THE SOCIETY'S EXISTENCE

The Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society was founded by a group of clergy and gentry in November 1847 as the 'Architectural and Archaeological Society for the County of Buckingham'. The 170th anniversary provided an excuse to remind the public of the society's existence and its continuing role as an advocate for heritage matters and research over an enormous range of subjects relating to the historic county.

Although the society's title may have changed a little, its geographic coverage has not, so we are still happy to encompass Eton, Slough and Milton Keynes. Bearing in mind that yet more changes in local government are in the offing, it is appropriate that we are one of the few remaining bodies in the county still waving the flag for a defined geographic area whose origins lie in the tenth century – a case of serious conservatism with a small 'c'!

Our 170th-year celebrations consisted of an initial members' event, four public lectures (advertised through our website, a well-designed leaflet, email circulation and other means), five hands-on market stall displays aimed particularly at young people, and several press articles.

The well-received members' evening in November 2017 which launched the event consisted of five short papers on the society's activities, its history and collections. This was followed in April by a joint meeting with the High Wycombe Society addressed by Leslie Webster, a nationally acknowledged expert on the Anglo-Saxon period, who focussed on our very own Saxon barrow at Taplow.

Then, in conjunction with the Missenden Abbey Trust and the Chess Valley Archaeological and Historical Society, we launched the publication of our report on excavations at the former abbey and its monastic church, with background information provided by Yvonne Edwards and a national overview from Jill Franklin. This was in the fine setting of the abbey's grounds, in sunny weather and with accompanying tours.

On a highly topical note we next incorporated the successful annual Bucks Local History Network day into the year's events. The Network was conceived and managed for many years by David Thorpe and colleagues, each year concentrating on a particular local history theme. This year was a bit different – the archaeology ahead of the construction of the HS2 high-speed rail line through Buckinghamshire. Speakers from both the county archaeology service and from Fusion, the contractors dealing with the 'enabling works', ensured a full house at the Oculus in Aylesbury. At this early stage fieldwork had been limited in scale, but significant new knowledge had already been gained and the pace of discovery will undoubtedly quicken in the next couple of years. We look forward to hearing more.

Our final BAS 170 talk was held in the University of Buckingham, with David Green providing an effective overview of the evolution of the town. We were very grateful to Sir Anthony Seldon, the university's Vice-Chancellor, for chairing this event.

The society's sturdy gazebo was put to good use on market days in High Wycombe, Chesham and Buckingham. We didn't need it in the Middleton Hall in central Milton Keynes, where we shared the space with a sandy 'beach', or in Aylesbury, where the Town Council had arranged the Heritage Open Day and provided a stall for us in the Market Square. All market authorities were helpful and welcoming and provided free space.

Passers-by had a chance to handle real objects at a 'Muddled Museum' and were challenged to distinguish between a Victorian doll's leg, Roman pottery, a Palaeolithic handaxe and a gun flint! As at all events, we sold BAS publications and handed out membership leaflets.

Finally, the Bucks Herald carried a number of articles by BAS authors on a range of period-themed objects that had been found in places across Buckinghamshire.

None of this would have happened without the invaluable expertise of a working party and the many volunteers who staged the events. It is very satisfactory to report (courtesy of our Honorary Membership Secretary) that there was a significant increase in membership applications during our 170th anniversary year.

Mike Farley