

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society, 2014.

The Meeting opened at the County Museum, Aylesbury, May 11th 2014 at 2.00 pm. The President of the Society, Richard Gem, took the chair.

1 Apologies for Absence: Apologies were received from Professor W. Mead, Cynthia Fitzjohn, Graham Parker, John Sheldon, Roger Bettridge, David Snoxell, Yvonne Edwards, Paul Lewis, Bill Willett, Elizabeth Oliver, Michael White, James Graves.

2 The minutes of the AGM held 11th May 11th 2013 were read and approved with no amendments. Richard Gem signed the minutes as a true and accurate record of proceedings.

3 Matters Arising. No matters were discussed.

4 Annual Reports

i Hon. Secretary: The report was published in the Spring Newsletter. There were no questions.

ii Hon. Treasurer: The annual report and accounts were published in the Spring Newsletter. An amended version was circulated at the meeting. There were no questions. The accounts were approved by the meeting: proposed by Kim Biddulph; seconded by Richard de Peyer.

iii Hon. Editor Records of Bucks: the report was published in the Spring Newsletter. There were no questions.

iv Hon. Librarian: the report was published in the Spring Newsletter. There were no questions.

v Hon. Archivist: the report was published in the Spring Newsletter. There were no questions.

vi Hon. Membership Secretary: the report was published in the Spring Newsletter. There were no questions.

5 President's Remarks and Vote of Thanks

HS2

During the past year your Council's and Officers' attention has been focussed especially on two areas. The first of these is the impact of the proposed HS2 railway line on the historic environment. I will not trespass here on the detailed account of our involvement that will be presented at the end of our

meeting: but I will reiterate the principles that are guiding our course of action. The Society at the outset took the view that its members would include both those who were supporters and those who were opponents of high-speed rail: the appropriate strategy for the Society corporately, therefore, was not to lobby for or against HS2 as such, but to put its effort into identifying heritage sites in the county that were under threat and to press for appropriate mitigation of the impact upon them. But this approach has not always been understood. An article in the *Observer* in March suggested that archaeologists in general were in favour of HS2 because it would offer them the opportunity of a huge archaeological trench across the country (the Director of the Council for British Archaeology was cited, but one cannot but suppose that the nuances of his position were being stripped away for journalistic purposes). A letter to the newspaper rebutting this thesis went unpublished. The Society would prefer to see heritage sites preserved in their appropriate setting. But if this cannot be achieved, and only then, is archaeological excavation a necessary undertaking.

Members of the Society have put a lot of time and effort into the first prong of our attack: identifying the heritage resource at risk. Now we are concentrating on the second strand: that of appropriate mitigation. It is in respect of this that our gravest concerns remain. That is, with the mounting costs of the HS2 project, we are apprehensive that the provision of adequate resources for mitigation will lose out – and also sufficient time for execution of archaeological works. But I will leave details of this to the presentation at the end of the meeting.

The County Museum

The second major issue to have concerned Council, together with our Holding Trustees who are responsible for our property assets, is the future of the County Museum. The Museum was established by the Society on the present site in 1907, to contain the items collected by us since our foundation in 1856; our property initially was the former Grammar School premises, to which Ceely House was added in 1944. In 1957 these building were leased to the County Council, who subsequently expanded with the acquisition of adjacent properties. A major six-year restoration programme was embarked on by the County Council in 1989; at the completion of which new agreements were entered into between the County Council and the Society in 1995. These comprised a lease of the Society's premises to the County Council for a term of 120 years, together with an agreement for the management by the County Council of the Society's collections (acquisitions for which continued up until 1957), to run concurrently with the lease.

From 2010 onwards the County Council has engaged with the Society on their plans for alternative management for the Museum. By late in 2013 the County Council was ready to move forward with a new model, and were in negotiations with us on the details that would need to be agreed with the Society. Management of the Museum collections and premises was to be contracted out to an independent Museum Trust, and a new Director was to be appointed; but the lease and agreement between the Society and the County Council would stand as at present. At a late stage in the negotiations,

however, to the surprise of the County Council and of the Society, the Museum Trust backed away. The intention now is that the process of transferring the management of the collections and premises to an independent trust will be managed within the County Council and over a longer period. To this end a new Director of the Museum has been appointed and has taken up his post: Richard de Peyer, formerly of High Wycombe Museum. To him we extend our best wishes for his future here, and for concluding discussions over the new management of the Museum.

Planning and the Historic Environment

In previous 'Remarks' I have touched upon various planning issues insofar as they affect the historic environment, not least in respect of the local community dimension. In 2012 I referred to the Government's new *National Planning Policy Framework* (NPPF) which swept away a raft of previous guidance on planning issues. In respect of the historic environment only three short pages were included in this document; but local planning authorities were required to take account of these in framing their Local Plan. Now the inadequacy of this approach has been revealed by the publication of the Government's *Planning Practice Guidance*, which provides a lengthy gloss on the NPPF, with detailed cross-references to a range of official documents (the primary format of the guidance is electronic, and after the meeting I can give the reference to anyone interested).

<http://planningguidance.planningportal.gov.uk/blog/guidance/conserving-and-enhancing-the-historic-environment>

The policy framework and practice guidance may be all very well in themselves, but are dependent to a considerable extent on local planning authorities building upon them, by setting out in their Local Plan positive strategies for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment – and that, of course, depends on the enlightened understanding and willingness of local authorities in financially challenging circumstances. The Society has been consulted by some of the local authorities in the county about their Local Plan at different stages of preparation. In the case of Aylesbury Vale District we were asked to comment at an early stage on what areas should be addressed in the Plan; while in the case of Chiltern District we received a draft Heritage Strategy that was quite comprehensive in its extent. Since then the whole Aylesbury Vale draft Plan has been withdrawn because it failed to comply with requirements for realistic housing numbers, and to consult adequately with adjacent authorities (a factor affecting many other districts throughout the country). This has caused problems for communities that have been preparing Neighbourhood Plans, which are supposed to operate in tandem with the district Local Plan. However, many communities are pressing ahead with their Neighbourhood Plan, including taking detailed account of the historic environment. I am glad to see, therefore, that the recent *Planning Practice Guidance* encourages those preparing Neighbourhood Plans to identify and include information about the heritage, and take it into account in making their plan; also that local planning authorities are encouraged to advise them in this process. These developments in the planning framework encourage local authorities to take an active role in developing strategies for the historic environment, at the

same time as they are being squeezed financially by central government. In my view, therefore, there needs to be not only top-down exhortation from central government, but also bottom-up pressure on local authorities to accept such an active role – pressure from local communities and from Societies such as ours. One respect in which this is particularly important is in the resourcing of the Historic Environment Record (HER), which in the case of Buckinghamshire is run by the County Council without any financial support from the district councils, despite the fact that they are its primary users in planning matters. There is a real danger that inadequate funding of the HER will impact on its viability, and it is time that the government should make its maintenance a statutory responsibility.

Perhaps this is the appropriate point at which to extend a welcome to the new BCC archaeologist Philip Markham, who comes to Buckinghamshire from Cornwall. The Society extends all best wishes to him for his time here, with assurances that we will support him in any way we can.

Meanwhile, the body that should be the most active guardian of the historic environment, English Heritage, is threatened with being split into two parts: one to manage the historic sites that are in guardianship; the other (Historic England) dealing with statutory regulation. The former will be inadequately resourced, unless it generates very substantial income for itself; while the latter will be deprived of the hands-on experience of directly managing historic sites that should inform its advice to other owners of historic properties.

Nonetheless, English Heritage did publish during 2013 its own *National Heritage Protection Plan*, which has included a section stressing the importance of 'local empowerment' as a key to heritage protection. This refers to the potential for local authorities, organisations and communities to develop local Heritage Protection Action Plans: but these again will require a level of local resources that will not be available uniformly. So, in theory this Society might take a lead role in developing an Action Plan for protecting some aspect or aspects of Buckinghamshire's heritage: but resourcing this in terms of commitment by individuals would be a challenge – or should I put that as a question? There are certainly aspects of the County's heritage that might benefit from such an approach (everyone may have their own candidates, so I will not single out particular examples). Perhaps after our HS2 involvement becomes less pressing we may be able to consider this.

I have probably now extended my Remarks to sufficient length; and so I will turn to the pleasant task of extending the Society's thanks to all those who have helped us through the year with their time and commitment.

Votes of Thanks

First I would like to thank on the Society's behalf those who have retired or are retiring as officers or members of council:

In the first place to **Honor Lewington**, who is now retiring as our Archivist (having retired as Librarian last year). A tribute to Honor's magnificent work for the Society has been written by Marian Miller with Diana Gulland and is

printed in the Newsletter. I will not repeat the account of her contributions detailed there, but will only re-iterate our thanks for what she has achieved – and for the projects she will be continuing to steer in a less official role.

During the year **Thea Van Dam** has retired as our Newsletter Editor, having given sterling service in producing the *Newsletter* to a high standard and on time twice-yearly over several years.

As to our Ordinary Members of Council, we have lost **Kim Taylor-Moore** during the year following her move away from the county. In addition we shall be losing **Karen Pepler** who completes her 3-year term at this AGM.

We are no less appreciative of the continuing contributions of our ongoing Officers and Ordinary Members of Council, without whom our work would come to a standstill: **Peter Marsden**, as Chair, **Michael Ghirelli** as Secretary, **Graham Parker** as Treasurer, **John Broad** as editor, **Marian Miller** as Librarian, **Bronwen Lee** as Membership Secretary; and Council Members **Yvonne Edwards**, **Julian Hunt**, **John Dodd** and **David Green**.

In addition to these we are blessed with many other helpers in various roles: **Bob Zeepvat** as Associate Editor, **Julian Hunt** as organiser of the lecture programme, **George Lamb** as outings organiser and co-ordinator of distribution for *Records*, **David Thorpe** for organising the Local History Network conference, **Michael Hardy** for arranging the annual church crawl, **Marian Miller** for co-ordinating the Society's response to HS2 in addition to her work as Librarian – and all the others who have helped in many ways.

Finally I would also wish to thank **Sarah Gray** of the County Museum who has fought for the Museum in challenging times; and also to thank all the **Museum staff** who have been keeping it on a steady course following her retirement.

To all these I invite the meeting to express its thanks in the customary way.

6 Election and Re-Election of Officers and Members of Council

6a Re-Elections

i Hon. President: Richard Gem was proposed by Michael Farley, seconded by Peter Gulland. Elected unanimously.

ii Hon. Chairman: Peter Marsden was proposed by Julia Wise, seconded by Diana Gulland. Elected unanimously.

iii Hon. Secretary: Michael Ghirelli was proposed by Corry Cashman, seconded by Michael Farley. Elected unanimously.

iv Hon Treasurer: Graham Parker was proposed by Honor Lewington, seconded by David Green. Elected unanimously.

v **Hon Librarian:** Marian Miller was proposed by George Lamb, seconded by Michael Hardy. Elected unanimously.

vii **Hon. Membership Secretary:** Bronwen Lee was proposed by Marian Miller, seconded by Peter Marsden. Elected unanimously.

vii **Hon. Editor Records of Bucks:** John Broad was proposed by Peter Marsden, seconded by Bob Zeepvat. Elected unanimously.

6b Elections

Hon Archivist: this post is vacant due to the resignation of Honor Lewington. Consideration is being given to merging the roles of librarian and archivist. A final decision on this is will be made at a later date.

6c Election and Re-Election of Ordinary Members of Council

i Current Ordinary Members for Re-Election

A Elected in 2012: Yvonne Edwards and Julian Hunt were proposed by Marian Miller and seconded by Peter Marsden. Elected unanimously. Note that Michael Ghirelli, now Hon Secretary, had been elected in 2012.

B Elected in 2013: John Dodd and David Green were proposed by Marian Miller and seconded by Peter Marsden. Elected unanimously.

ii New members for Election

Standing	Proposed	Seconded
George Lamb	Michael Farley	Michael Ghirelli
Nigel Wilson	Richard Gem	Michael Ghirelli
Kim Biddulph	Michael Farley	Peter Marsden

All were elected unanimously.

Nicola Powell will confirm with her organisation whether she may stand. There were no proposals from the floor of the meeting.

7 Appointment of Hon Auditor:

Mrs Dharamshi proposed by Michael Ghirelli, seconded by Kim Biddulph. Passed unanimously.

8 Vice Presidents

Vice Presidents serve until their resignation or removal by an AGM. The current Vice Presidents are: Lord Cottesloe, C VDawes, M E Farley. Mrs K Hagerty, H Hanley, M Hart, Professor W Mead, D C Maynard, and Mrs D Gulland.

9 Any Other Business

Richard de Peyer, the new appointed Director of the County Museum, addressed the Society.

The AGM closed at 3.30 pm.

The formal business of the meeting was followed by a presentation from Peter Marsden: **The Effects of HS2 on the Historic Environment of Buckinghamshire**, after which refreshments were served.