

BAS Hon Secretary's Report for 2014.

Thanks to the unstinted efforts of a core of diligent volunteers, over the past year, the Society has continued to justify its claim to be the premier society for the promotion and study of the archaeology, local history, landscape and architecture of Buckinghamshire. One stated objective of the Society has been the defence and protection of the local landscape and archaeological heritage. Whether or not the construction of a high speed rail link between London and the north of the country will be beneficial to the national economy must be a matter of individual opinion and is not something on which the Society as such has passed judgment, but undeniably the landscape and the archaeological and architectural heritage of a swathe of rural land cut the length of the county from Denham to Turweston will be profoundly affected. There has been a number of initiatives intended to ensure that mitigation procedures are in place and that the general public is made aware of what might be lost as the earth moving machinery attacks the soil. There was a pleasing number of visitors to the Open Day organised by Michael Farley at Stoke Mandeville who were made aware of the destruction of the site of the remains of the mediaeval church where an unknown number of bodies will have been buried and which must be raised up and relocated in a suitable mausoleum. Michael has also planned the forthcoming Heritage on the Line Conference due to be held on May when the impact of the HS2 line all the length of the county will be discussed by a number of eminent scholars and experts.

It is not only HS2 that threatens to change profoundly the landscape of Bucks. What has also demanded the vigilance of the Society is the matter of planning: the ever continuing expansion of the London megalopolis makes seemingly insatiable demands for sites to be freed up for the development of an exurban sprawl, threatening to make real the nightmare vision of the face of Chiltern and Vale irremediably scarred by a redbrick rash. BAS is maintaining an active watch on planning issues where they might affect landscape and heritage; last October, Nigel Wilson, an Elected Member of the BAS Council, attended a Stakeholder meeting hosted by AVDC, whose Local Plan was not authorised, making more difficult resistance to unsuitable developments, and hindering the defence of landscape and heritage through the area. BAS is concerned to make planners aware of the need to put in place adequate and effective procedures that will ensure the preservation of landscape and heritage.

One core function of the Society is to support the County Museum. BAS was therefore delighted to welcome as new appointed Director Richard de Peyer who brings his expertise and experience acquired from his previous posting at the Museum at Wycombe. Much of the Bucks County Museum's collection is provided by BAS, who also own and lease out the building in Church Street where the Museum is actually housed. Currently, the running of the Museum is now the responsibility of a new Museum Trust, and there have been and continue to be lengthy negotiations between the County Council, the Society, and the Trust, to establish a satisfactory arrangement that will ensure the proper running of the Museum and housing of the collection. Peter Marsden, the Society's Chairman, and

Trustee Michael Farley, have devoted much time to the endeavour of ensuring an outcome that fulfils the objectives of the Society.

One objective of BAS is the preservation of a rich heritage of archives and the organisation of the Library. Go into the Museum on a Wednesday, and you will find a devoted team of volunteers led by Marian Miller, sorting and classifying the archives and books, and making available to researchers the documents and volumes they need. Until last year, the position of Honorary Archivist and Honorary Librarian were separate. Marian Miller undertook to act in both roles until a new archivist could be appointed in the place of Honor Lewington; no volunteer has come forward, so Marian will in future function as both librarian and archivist with the title of Honorary Librarian. She is aided by a team of volunteers who work assiduously in the muniment room in the basement of the building. Garry Marshal has completed the transcribing of the Hohler archive and has started to sort the Society's own records into order. It has been necessary to initiate an appointments system in the Library to accommodate researchers – some of them travelling the length of the country to reach Aylesbury - and to make available to them the documents they require.

Of course, the effectiveness of the Society depends on it having a steady cash flow that must come primarily from its membership subscriptions. Graham Parker the Hon. Treasurer has maintained a careful watch on the finances of the Society and has been able to report that the financial situation of BAS is healthy. This is particularly thanks to the higher subscriptions that he had recommended, and that were approved by BAS Council in 2013. Unfortunately, there has been some confusion among members as to what the new rates are, and the Hon. Membership Secretary Bron Lee has had a lengthy and frustrating struggle trying to ensure that members of the Society are aware that they need to pay at the new rate rather than at the old one.

The Society was established in the mid nineteenth century with the aim of promoting architectural and archaeological studies. Inspired by this vision, over the past twelvemonth several enthusiastic and dedicated volunteers have organised a variety of events and visits. There has been the regular lecture programme run by Julian Hunt, with lectures delivered by Julian himself, Ian Beckett, Richard de Peyer, Michael Farley, and Michael Ghirelli. Michael Hardy ran his ever popular Church Crawl, this time to include churches towards the Bucks-Beds border on the eastern side of the county. George Lamb, though badly injured in an unfortunate traffic accident outside his house, was the organiser of the Summer Excursions, which included visits Amersham, Kenwood House and Hampstead, and Wing and Stadhampton; Peter and Diana Gulland, and Julian Hunt were excursion leaders. Meanwhile, David Thorpe organised the Bucks Local History Network Conference held in the north of the County in the Royal Latin School in the original shire town of Buckingham itself. The audience heard a variety lectures under the overall title of *Defining Buckinghamshire* delivered by Jeremy Haslam, Julian Hunt, Dr. Richard Oliver, Tom Harper, and Dr. Kate Tiller.

Conscious of its responsibility to preserve and protect the architectural heritage of the county, BAS Council was pleased to approve a grant towards the restoration of the Lovett monument in All Saints Church, Soulbury, a work by Grinling Gibbons who

is most usually remembered for his wood carving, but who produced here a fine memorial wrought in stone.

In 2013, Peter Marsden inspired the formation of an Active Archaeology Group. Initially in the winter months, a series of practical sessions were held in the Museum, but this past year, the group has got its hands dirty, going out into the field and concentrating on two projects in particular. At Hogshaw, a band of volunteers aided and advised by Dr Kris Lockyear has been undertaking a magnetometric survey of the site of the Priory or Commandery of the Knights Hospitaller, abandoned and thrown down by enclosing landlords at the end of the fifteenth century. Many of the group also are actively involved in the Chiltern Hillforts Project, systematically surveying the chain of Iron Age enclosures the length of the chalk scarp from the Thames into Bedfordshire.

BAS publishes its journal, Records of Buckinghamshire. Bob Zeepvat the Assistant Editor has ensured that the issue of 2014 maintained the highest scholarly standards with a variety of papers covering the local history, architecture and archaeology of the county. The project is now underway, especially the work of John Dodd, of scanning and digitising past issues and making them available online on the Society website. John has also been active in investigating how BAS might be of help in the organisation of County's Historic Environment Record. Diana Gulland has published a complete index of Records of Bucks from the first issue in 1847 through to the start of the twentieth century, which will be printed and made available to members in the forthcoming year. As usual, in addition to Records of Bucks, the Society Newsletter was published in Spring and Autumn.

The BAS Council has met regularly with meetings chaired by Peter Marsden whose energy, enthusiasm and leadership it would be impossible to exaggerate. Permanent members include the Officers of the Council, along with the renowned scholar of Romanesque architecture, Richard Gem, President of the Society, and Michael Farley, the abiding genius of Buckinghamshire Archaeology. Council was fortunate to see new Elected Members Nicola Powell, Kim Biddulph, George Lamb and Nigel Wilson, each of them bringing with them energy and new ideas to the table. George himself was the victim of a horrific crash outside his home last year, and members of the Society will be pleased to know he has returned, recovered and once again enthusiastically making his giant contribution to the life of the Society.

Finally, with sadness it is necessary to record the passing of Mrs Kathleen Hagerty, Mr Graham Atkins, and Professor William Mead, former President of the Society. The Society is nominally an organisation for the promotion of archaeological studies, but Bill Mead is a reminder that BAS explores areas beyond that defined field: he was a historical geographer who made an important contribution to our understanding of the development of the landscape of Buckinghamshire, as witness the map of the county on which he painstakingly recorded from aerial photographs the distribution of ridge and furrow. A scholar whose researches took him far beyond the shores of this island, he nevertheless remained deeply attached to the county of his upbringing, and for many years he chose to be closely associated with the Society that concerned itself with the study, defence, and protection of the landscape in which he had been raised.

Michael Ghirelli, Honorary Secretary.