

HS2 'HERITAGE ON THE LINE CONFERENCE'

A success, but will it make a difference?

More than a hundred people attended the society's 'Heritage on the Line' Conference in Weston Turville on Saturday 16 May to hear speakers on how the planned construction of the HS2 high-speed rail line will affect archaeological sites, historic buildings and ancient landscapes across Buckinghamshire.

Helen Glass, the Archaeology and Heritage Manager of HS2 Limited, gave the opening talk of the conference, reassuring the audience that she and her colleagues are well aware of the impact their project will have on our history and archaeology, and have plans to manage this.

Hopefully the speakers who followed gave Helen much solid information to take back to the office with her in support of their concerns at just how heavy this impact is going to be.



- Professor Danielle Shreve told of the prehistoric layers that underlie the Vale of Aylesbury. The line of HS2 cuts across pits where mammoth bones have been found – and across an unexcavated prehistoric landscape.
- Alison Doggett of the Chilterns Conservation Board used the 1620 estate map of Chequers to demonstrate the unique historic value of the Chilterns, where HS2 will plough deep cuttings and cross high viaducts.
- Sandy Kidd of Historic England examined the archaeology of Grim's Ditch. HS2 construction will remove a 120-metre section of this Bronze or Iron-Age earthwork, and bury the line of a further 350 metres under spoil.
- Richard Wheeler of the National Trust spoke of the unique 18th-century garden landscape of Hartwell House, where HS2 clips a corner of the park. The NT have asked for the rail line to be buried under a 'land bridge' to reduce the noise and intrusion.
- Alan Ford of Cotswold Archaeology told the conference of the Roman town at Fleet Marston. Their geophysical survey of the area for the HS2 Environmental Statement revealed a double line of previously unknown buildings along both sides of Roman Akeman Street, and in the path of HS2.
- Mike Farley outlined the effect of HS2 on the ruined Stoke Mandeville old church, where the rail line will remove not just the remains of the church but the whole churchyard – and an estimated 2,600 burials may have to be moved.
- Peter Marsden addressed the historic and archaeological issues at Doddershall, where the rail line will cut through deserted medieval village and newly identified Roman sites; at Twyford, where it runs close by the double open-hall of St Mary's House; and at Chetwode, where a former monastic water-economy landscape will be affected.

- And finally Richard de Peyer of the County Museum set out the challenge that needs to be faced in order to preserve, analyse and understand the large number of archaeological finds that HS2 construction will unearth.

The conference was chaired by Richard Gem, president of BAS, who emphasised that the society's concern is not to oppose HS2 as a whole, but to ensure that the project is fully aware of its historic and archaeological impact in order to minimise the effect on Buckinghamshire's heritage.

The work of bringing the conference together was mostly done by Mike Farley, aided by Julian Hunt, on the day by many members of the society, and supported by the presence of the county council archaeologists.

Helen Glass, HS2's Archaeology Manager, told us that the Bucks Archaeological Society is the only county society along the rail line's Phase 1 route to play such an active role. Let's hope the decision-makers are listening.

Peter Marsden, BAS Chair