



Active Archaeology Group

After a busy summer, we have worked on fewer projects through the winter, though there are more at the ideas/planning stage. Several of our projects are still in the process of being written up, having been delayed for a variety of reasons.

Grand Union Canal

Following on from our activities reported in the Autumn 2017 Newsletter, the rubble was cleared from the cellar at Whitehouses, and The Wendover Arm Trust invited us to return to survey it, which a small group did at the end of January. The steps down to the cellar remain somewhat dangerous, and certainly could not be opened to the general public. We believe they were once protected by a lean-to, which must have had a door at the top since there is no evidence of one at the bottom. The ceiling, with a large hole through which the rubble had been poured, is currently propped up. We were able to measure the cellar, and noted that it had a fireplace in one wall (which seems to be more or less directly under another on the ground floor), raised a little way above the floor. There is also a recess in the opposite wall, about 18ins above floor level – this has been called a larder, but its true function is not clear – it appears to have a deliberately blocked flue at the top. The cellar will, in due course, be filled with gravel to stabilise it and make the site suitable for public access.



Cellar Fireplace



Cellar Larder

Three Locks, which was supposed to be concreted over, actually remains untouched since we left (we think Carillion were involved somewhere). We are seeking permission to return and finish some of the work that was curtailed by time constraints, as well as the piles of bricks.

Doug Stuckey has researched the background – he has already given a very well received talk to LBDAS (Leighton Buzzard and District Archaeological and Historical Society) and is also going to repeat the talk for the AAG, for Marlow and for the CBA Spring Conference.

Ivinghoe Aston



Cremation Urn



Samian Ware

We were able to return to this site on 15th October, along with Kris Lockyear from UCL and some of his CAGG (Community Archaeology Geophysics Group) team, to do a magnetometry survey, using the Foerster Machine, with 4 probes spaced at 25cm intervals instead of the usual 50cms. This increases the number of readings per square metre from 20 to 40, and correspondingly makes it more likely that small anomalies will be picked up. A number of possible cremations were located (including the second one we had found) and a larger anomaly which Kris thinks may be the remains of a funeral pyre, or perhaps a bustum burial, where the funeral pyre is sited over a pit so that the remains fall into the pit as the pyre burns. We noted at this time that it was still fairly easy to locate our original excavation, provided one knew where to look. We were therefore surprised when we returned on 12th November to find our original excavation had essentially disappeared – it took some time to locate it. We had picked a very cold and windy day – we spent a lot of time chasing our kit around the field, which at least kept us warm. We did not place our new excavation quite perfectly – but we were near enough to be able to locate the black plastic we had left in the bottom of the hole, and simply had to extend our trench a bit. We were able to expose the second burial properly, and we found there were at least three

vessels including a large bowl or urn containing the cremated remains. The bottom half of this vessel was in situ, although broken, and we may be able to stick it together for display. The cremated remains were mixed with packed soil, and as we did not have a fine enough sieve, we simply placed the mixed material in boxes to be dealt with later. One of the other vessels associated with the burial was Samian ware which has been provisionally dated to around 150AD. The other vessels also appear to be Roman. Grateful thanks go to the landowner (Tom Nash) for allowing us access.

Kris is hoping that we will be able to 'ground truth' his results, by excavating one more of the possible cremation burials, and the possible funeral pyre (or at least put a small trench across it to establish what it is). This would be of great help to him when interpreting other sites. We are currently working up a proposal for this.

Quarrendon

Richard Gem is in contact with Kris Lockyear to try to arrange some geophysics on this site.

Mike Farley reports that some of the pottery picked up by the field walking group has turned out to be Bronze Age. Mike Farley's report follows:

AAG fieldwalk at Quarrendon in April 2017

The deserted medieval village of Quarrendon with its moated site, fishponds, remains of a chapel and substantial Tudor garden earthworks, is a scheduled ancient monument now managed by the Buckinghamshire Conservation Trust. Many years ago the Society held an open day here to draw attention to the importance of the site and recently ran another day in conjunction with the Trust for local residents. The Trust intends putting an arable field adjacent to the monument down to grass In discussion with the County Archaeological Service; a last opportunity was grasped to search the field for any ploughed-up items which might help in interpreting the area. Twenty members of AAG and others helped on the day.

The most prolific find was roof tile. Considering that about three hectares were checked and the proximity of the field to the medieval earthworks, pottery finds were relatively thin on the ground and fragmented. Those with identifiable features were even sparser. That said, about a hundred sherds of probable medieval date were recorded. No sherds of Saxon date were noted, nor later medieval sherds. However, there were two surprises. Perhaps the most significant was a decorated sherd from a mid-Bronze

Age Deverel-Rimbury vessel (see picture below which includes other sherds probably of the same date).



These large urns are best known as containers for cremations but also occur on domestic site, for example locally at Walton. The second surprise was the presence of fifteen Romano-British sherds. Pottery of this period had previously been noted about four-hundred metres away. The whole suggests that Quarrendon has a complex land-use history. A full report on the walk will be available shortly.

Frith Hill Great Missenden

The Chess Valley Archaeological and Historical Society is investigating this site. Yvonne Edwards arranged for a group (mainly AAG members) to visit the site on a rather chilly January day. It is an interesting site, and although looked after by Historic England, is in danger of being damaged by some rather ill-advised tree planting. Excavation started on 15th Feb, three trenches having been opened by a team composed of Chess Valley and AAG members. A limited amount of excavation has been permitted by Historic England. So far there have been some pottery finds which appear to be medieval but these have not yet been properly dated. The main mound, which was thought to be a twelfth century motte, seems to be largely a dump of rubble from when the adjacent road was built. More information will follow in the next newsletter when the excavation is complete.

Wing Heritage Group

Further test pits are planned for this year, starting about April. Contact sarah.roe01@gmail.com for more information.

Verulamium

The geophysics survey of the Roman town will continue in August.

CBA South Midlands

The Spring Conference will be held on Sunday 15th April in Winslow.

Programme details are not yet available but will be circulated as soon as possible.

Pauline continues to represent amateur archaeology in Bucks on this group – please let her know of anything that should be raised with the group.