

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

**TO: The Berkhamsted & District Archaeological Society
(for the season ending April 2017)**

The Society has enjoyed a full season of eight varied lectures on many different aspects of archaeology and of historic interest, ranging over the Stone Age, Bronze Age and Iron Age and hoards in Britain, Pilgrimage and the Silk Road. Whilst it is invidious to single out a single lecture from such a galaxy perhaps I might be forgiven for drawing particular attention to Professor Mike Parker Pearson's lecture on Stonehenge. Here we heard the latest news and to get Mike to visit BDAS was quite a feather in our cap – that night we had 16 visitors. Tonight we finish our lecture season with a talk on Dura Europos, a fascinating site that I have not been able to visit but which I know from the incredible finds when I have visited the Antioch Museum. All our lecture meetings have been arranged most competently by our Meetings Secretary, Sue Howard, and bookings of lecturers is well in hand for our next season starting in September.

The Society's excavations continued at Ashridge under the direction of Ken Wallis and Graham Juniper with many members participating. The detailed 8th Report has been completed and a copy lodged with the Dacorum Heritage Trust in the Museum Store in Clarence Road. The Society's excavation team assisted the Chiltern Conservation Volunteers in investigating some small rectangular mounds in Hockeridge Woods, and at Ashridge trenches opened in 2015 were extended to look for a parallel wall to the north-south wall found in earlier years but not found in the extensions because of the proximity of yew trees. I shall read out a fuller account of the work of the excavations following the presentation of this Report.

In May the Society made its customary annual excursion, this year's, also a one-day event, was to Oxford to visit the Ashmolean and Pitt Rivers museums and the Rycote Chapel arranged by Dawn Hunt. If the Society is going to be able to revert to the much enjoyed weekends away arrangements in the future there is a dire need of someone to pick up Brendon and Janet Spark's mantle, who took over from John and Marghareta Dahl, if we are to continue with those weekends. I know that there is a lot of work involved in making the arrangements and so if there is anyone, or a couple, who would be prepared to take this on, please talk over the possibility with either me or Jill.

I have organised three out of the four last May Awaydays. I have asked several times for someone to take on Transport Officer so ably run by Laura, and for a person to look after the logistics. I worked out a full day excursion centred around Andover, its Iron Age museum and several other interesting sites and churches. It needed someone to do the recce on the ground as medically I had been advised to cut down. No one was forthcoming for that. Rita, a willing volunteer took on the Transport post and began to make the arrangements. By the Committee meeting before last month's lecture no one had come forward, only Rita was in place. It was decided to make the change to a single site visit. The choice of Bignor Roman villa or Fishbourne Roman Palace was put to the meeting – there was a strong show of hands in preference for Fishbourne. The details were sent round asking who would support it – there were only 13 definite replies. That low number, even with the smaller coach, would have a cost of over £40 – the May Awayday has, therefore, sadly to be cancelled through lack of interest. The proposed visit to the Andover area has been put on hold. Rita is prepared to continue as Transport Officer but the Committee has had to decide that if there is no one to take on the logistics, all the programme is carefully worked out for them, they don't have to research and create it, by the Christmas meeting there will be no excursion next May. It is a very sad thing to have to decide but it would appear that there is a strong core to attend lectures, and also a good digging team, but as regards any excursions, apathy rules.

In the calling notice for this AGM the present holders of office and the Committee are listed, and have agreed to stand again. but new blood is really needed to help maintain the Society's momentum. My name is there, again, as Chairman, and I would remind you that our first Chairman and founder was Frank Leek, who died in office in 1985. You elected me his successor at the AGM in 1987, and that is now 30 years ago! Frank always gave the first lecture each season, and I have maintained that – 29 to date and each one different – a tall order. I am prepared to stand again as there appears to be no other option, and I do stress that we need to have an elected Vice Chairman – Brendon Sparks and previously John Dahl had taken on that roll in the past and circumstances led to them both relinquishing it. The Society needs new and willing volunteers from its membership to keep us on the road. I don't want my tenure as your Chairman to be an "until death us do part" office – that is why a couple of years ago I stepped down as the President of the Welwyn Archaeological Society, having been elected to succeed the late eminent archaeologist John Ward-Perkins.

In conclusion my thanks are due to the Committee, and particularly to Jill who produces immaculate and accurate Minutes that ease the management of the Society, and those in it who take on some of the very specific tasks needed to keep the Society running and vibrant. Notable amongst the unsung and unlisted 'heroes' is Peter Grainger who maintains and updates our really splendid and informative website – the very public face of the Society. Not least are David and Mary Fletcher who arranged our last Christmas party that so well supported my talk on Pilgrimage.

Peter A. Clayton
Chairman, Berkhamsted & District Archaeological Society