



## Buckinghamshire Historic Environment Forum minutes

Minutes of the meeting of the Buckinghamshire Historic Environment Forum held on Tuesday 16 April 2024 in Mezzanine 2, Walton Street Offices, Walton St, Aylesbury HP20 1UA.

### Members present

P Brazier, B Chapple OBE (Chairman), R Currie and Gary Marshall, M Woods

### Others in attendance

P Clements, N Crank, H Curtis, M Ferron, L Harvey, J Horton L Lawrence, P Markham and J Wise

### Agenda Item

#### **1 Apologies/Changes to membership**

Members heard apologies from Cllr R Bradburn (Milton Keynes Council), R Currie (Wycombe Museum), Cllr C Hall (Milton Keynes Council), Cllr C Harriss (Buckinghamshire Council), B Hudson (Amersham Museum), W Morrison (Conservation Board for the Chilterns AONB) and C Pugh (National Trust)

#### **2 Declarations of interest**

There were none.

#### **3 Minutes of the last meeting**

The final sentence of the first paragraph on page 5 to be corrected to read, 'crown post roofs...'.  
*post roofs...'*.

#### **RESOLVED**

That the minutes of the meeting held 14<sup>th</sup> September 2023 be agreed as a correct record, subject to the listed alteration.

#### **4 Talk on The Mystery of Grims Ditch**

The Archaeology team at Buckinghamshire Council worked collaboratively with the Chilterns Conservation Board and the Chalk Cherries and Chairs (CCC) initiative, which aimed to connect local people with their environment and increase local knowledge. The Mystery of Grim's Ditch project was a key part of this initiative and a

project that the council was directly involved with. The original 5-year scope of the project was revised due to staffing challenges and a new scope was designed to be completed within 1 year.

Grim's Ditch was the largest and longest visible heritage asset in the Chilterns, extending into Hertfordshire. Not much was known about the ditch and its purpose. The project involved both research and outreach elements.

Geophysical survey work was carried out by the two Buckinghamshire Young Archaeologists Clubs (YAC) and New Shoots, the equivalent young ecologists group. The youngsters also produced some wonderful drawings and speculative work about the original purpose of the ditch.

HS2 conducted magnetometry survey in the area, but there were gaps in survey areas and information due to the limited survey methods used. The council wanted to find out if the feature was continuous or a group of features as HS2 was not able to answer this. A site at Road Farm was surveyed with 34 young people using 4 types of geophysical survey including ground penetrating radar, magnetometry, resistivity, and a new system invented in Australia for deep mineral surveys. The line of the ditch was picked up and it was confirmed that in this area the feature did continue. New Shoots ecologists were also able to relate the geophysics results to agricultural uses and potential.

12 primary schools were contacted resulting in 3 talks being delivered in line with the Key Stage 2 curriculum on the Stone Age.

Guided walks were planned and delivered to include wildlife sites and information with the assistance of other teams from BMERC and Ecology (collaboration). A self-guided walk leaflet was made available from the Heritage Portal and the Chilterns Conservation Board website.

An accessible virtual tour was planned as part of a new phase of funded work.

Volunteer researcher, Susan Holmes had provided help to the Archaeology team with their research. Her interest continued following up with legacy research projects. The project was largely funded by Heritage Lottery funds.

CCC continued for the next 6 months, and further information was available on their website.

It was suggested that additional funds might be available from HS2 for future research projects and outreach.

The project had added to the existing knowledge about the ditch, and HS2 studies revealed that the ditch carried on to the North as well. There was evidence of Roman period infilling. Hopefully, future funding could unlock yet more knowledge.

Part of the scheduled area was due to be excavated by HS2 very soon, so more information and open days at the site would follow. Very little dating information

was available and Optically Stimulated Luminescence (OSL) dating was unsuccessful previously. It was hoped that this time there would be more conclusive evidence.

The purpose of the ditch was unknown, but was definitely a made feature. In the opinion of the Archaeology team, it may have been highly visible (white) and used as a transport route, though this was uncertain. The most common theory was that the ditch was used as a land division between tribes, and there was evidence in Hertfordshire that it was palisaded (fenced). There was very little existing research because it had been scheduled and protected – HS2 provided a unique opportunity to learn more.

The primary purpose of the project was to highlight the Ditch and help increase local awareness. All new information would go into the HER and the online Heritage portal and would be accessible to people around the world

## **5 Recent Discoveries at Little Kimble**

Attention was drawn to a temporary exhibition at the Discover Bucks Museum concerning a recent excavation in Little Kimble, and the artifacts and discoveries made following the project. A comprehensive account of the excavation was provided in the papers circulated in advance of the meeting. The excavation site, located adjacent to the Lower Icknield Way, yielded a remarkable number of finds, including high-status Roman pottery, jewellery, coins, a Bronze Age pit, and several cremations, despite the absence of any obvious settlement. Furthermore, 14 wells were discovered, which were believed to have been seasonal, and it was ascertained that the water table in the area fluctuated. The site remained enigmatic, and it was suggested that it may have served as a rest area for travellers, where they could stop for water and rest, or as a ceremonial roadside shrine. There was no evidence of a nearby villa. The opportunity for excavation at the site arose due to the construction of a new housing development.

## **6 The Olney/Aldi Roman Mosaic**

The related planning application for the site in Olney had been for mixed-use housing and commercial, and was an allocated site. Local people had been involved in the creation of a sound Neighbourhood plan. There had been a scheduled Roman settlement site close by to the east (across the road) and very little wider investigation had been carried out. No pre-application archaeological information had been supplied. In April 2018, trial trenching was carried out, which uncovered enclosure ditches and pits (Roman) and considerable quantities of Roman pottery. Outline planning permission had been granted without any archaeological condition, and reports were not provided at the time but were finally released in 2020.

New owners had submitted variations, and an outline approach to mitigations had been agreed. New applications were then considered for a supermarket. A mosaic had been uncovered within a 3-room, 20m long stone-built structure. Trenches had

been extended to learn more. The painted reproductions by David Neal were fantastic, but they didn't do the real thing justice. The design was very similar to a mosaic discovered at Great Staughton in Cambridgeshire and might have been made by the same group of mosaicists.

The mosaic had been temporarily re-covered while planning progressed. Eventually, the site was publicized, and a series of 3 public open days were made available. The mosaic had been carefully protected and covered and was preserved in situ. Two on-site interpretation boards were yet to be installed.

## **7 Update From Members and Partners**

### Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society

2024 was the 25th Local History Network Conference for BAS. The key-note speaker was Ruth Goodman on the topic of Farming and Agricultural Landscape in Bucks. Lucy Laurence had talked about the Mystery of Grim's Ditch at the Society's AGM. The Society had seen a drop off in membership following a rise in membership fees and aging membership.

### Buckinghamshire Conservation Trust

Work had taken place at Quarrendon Leas north of the site of the remains of St Peter's Chapel (location plan circulated). A disabled access (DDA-compliant) path was installed some years ago and the recent work involved removing some estate railings from the churchyard and relocating them to the footpath with a view to protecting the adjacent Elizabethan water garden site.

No structures were found in the watching brief, but deep loam deposits were identified with underlying clay. A lack of human remains suggested the churchyard was not used for burials. Some medieval ceramics were discovered and some post medieval pottery, a horse harness pendant and 17 fragments of animal bone. A watching brief report was in draft.

### Buckinghamshire Council Archaeology Service

It was a busy period for the team. The Levelling Up & Regeneration Act had made the provision of an Historic Environment Record a statutory requirement. It was hoped that this would attract additional funding from central government.

### Milton Keynes City Council Archaeology Service

There had not been much fieldwork. The scheduled part of the Roman town at Magiovinium was handed over to MK Council ownership by the developers of a linked development site. A new DDA-compliant footpath provided access to the site from the development and the council's land was reverted to meadow from arable use.

The Heritage at Risk list had been updated and was now published. A number of

their Conservation Area reviews were underway, and the New Town Local List was plodding along - 160 out of 240 were now being progressed. Challenges relating to tall buildings continued to be of concern. There was a New City plan (Local Plan) in progress and site allocations were coming forward for screening.

The only scheduled hillfort at Danesborough Camp made the national news, sadly due to damage caused by mountain bikers.

In respect of community outreach – the next MK Archaeology Day would take place on Sat 2nd November 2024. A community archaeology dig of Civil War defences at Newport Pagnell took place later in the year (June 17th) in conjunction with Cotswold Archaeology and they expected around 300 volunteers.

#### Buckinghamshire Council Heritage Team

Since the last meeting of the Forum, the formal Local List Project was drawn to an early conclusion due to budget cuts, however, phase 2 nominations were still progressing towards formal adoption in June 2024.

Funding had been secured for review of four of their larger Conservation Areas (CA) at Winslow, Aylesbury, Haddenham and Buckingham. Work began on the Aylesbury review that week with others to follow swiftly behind. The funding allowed them to retain Lisa Harvey as their Heritage Projects Officer, and this also enabled them to work with the Parish Council at East Claydon to consider designation of a new CA for East Claydon and a review of the Botolph Claydon CA. They were continuing to seek funding to undertake reviews of High Wycombe and Chesham which were considered to be a priority by the team.

They were dealing with a high proportion of enforcement cases at the time and had recently issued an Injunction on a site in Great Horwood and gained access by warrant to another site in Aylesbury. Both situations involved alleged unauthorised works to listed buildings.

#### **8 Date of the next meeting**

The date of the next meeting would be confirmed following discussions, and communicated in due course.