

AGENDA ITEM

EMERGENCY ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORDING FUND

To: Buckinghamshire Historic Environment Forum

Date: 10th February 2015

Authors: Report of the Acting Treasurer

A. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1 To review the operation of the emergency recording fund.

B. PROPOSED ACTION

- 2 The Forum is invited to **NOTE:**

- a) **use of the Emergency Recording Fund**

- b) **the current status of the fund**

- c) **and REVIEW the Emergency Recording Fund Protocol**

C. RESOURCES

- 3 The current balance is approximately £3,000. Payments are still awaited from Milton Keynes and Wycombe District Council for 2014/15.

D. SUPPORTING INFORMATION

The Emergency Recording Fund was used in October 2014 to fund the excavation of a Roman casket burial, found by a metal-detectorist during a rally on land near Whitchurch, Aylesbury.

The burial was discovered by John Steele during a metal-detecting event run by Weekend Wanderers, a Hampshire-based detecting group, in October 2014 in a field near Whitchurch, Aylesbury. After uncovering some of the metal finds and pottery the event organiser, Peter Welch, contacted Ros Tyrrell, the County Finds Liaison Officer for the Portable Antiquities Scheme at Buckinghamshire County Museum Trust. She alerted Eliza Alqassar, Archaeological Officer at Buckinghamshire County Council.

Buckinghamshire County Council then commissioned Oxford Archaeology to excavate the burial using funding from the Bucks Historic Environment Forum's Emergency Recording Fund. The excavation took place over three days, with Oxford Archaeology staff being assisted with the help of the detectorists and the landowners.

The excavation revealed a Roman (late 2nd century AD) wooden casket burial (1.10m long by 0.70m wide) with a rich assemblage of grave goods including two Samian ware cups, two Samian ware dishes, a pottery flagon or dish, two glass vessels, a bronze jug with decorated handle, a bronze patera (dish), an iron lamp, two unidentified lead objects and an urned cremation burial. The remains of the wooden casket were identified as an outline of iron nails and organic deposits within the burial pit (Oxford Archaeology 2014).

The urned cremation was excavated within the laboratory at Oxford Archaeology. Initial conclusions suggest it was an adult of high status. A red jasper intaglio ring depicting the Roman goddess Minerva and the god Mercury was found among the remains, along with hobnails from shoes.



Samian cup, intaglio and bronze handle. ©Oxford Archaeology

The burial is of particular interest and importance because it is rare to find them with multiple metal, glass and ceramic vessels. Iron lamps, or open lamp holders, are particularly rare in late 2nd century AD burials. Similarly, burials with bronze vessels of such quality are also scarce. Comparable casket burials include one from Wendover and another from Thornborough. This rich burial contains a characteristic combination of relatively rare object types, of which the decorated jug is individually the most important and, because of the unique detail of its decoration, a piece of national importance, enhanced by association with a securely dated burial context (Oxford Archaeology 2014, 11).

The finds have been cleaned and analysed by specialists at Oxford Archaeology, and a report has been written about the discovery. The landowners and the finder very generously donated the finds to Buckinghamshire Museum. The County Museum will be fundraising later in the year to raise the £3,000 needed to get all the finds, especially the fragile bronze flagon, properly conserved to enable further study and display.

The excavation cost was £1572, the micro-excavation of the cremation was £1400 and the report was £1600. Therefore we have spent a total of c.£5,000 to date. Further costs anticipated to complete archive – finish excavating the flagon base, label pottery, package for archive – can we justify these?

The Museum has agreed to pay conservation costs (likely to be c.£3,000) but would need to fundraise for this.

E. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Protocol for the Operation of the Buckinghamshire Emergency
Archaeological Recording Fund

CONTACT OFFICER: ELIZA ALQASSAR 01296 383798