

Buckinghamshire Historic Environment Forum

24th September 2008

National Trust Report

Boarstall Tower Excavations

As part of National Archaeology Week in July of 2008 the National Trust carried out excavations and survey at Boarstall Tower, located on the Oxfordshire-Buckinghamshire border between Bicester and Aylesbury. The excavations were designed to investigate potential buried evidence for the former Tudor (?) house at the centre of the moated complex. It is thought to have been pulled down by the Aubrey family in 1778 after the death of their young son. The building is shown in superb detail on a bird's eye engraving dating from 1695, and the footprint also appears on several geophysics surveys conducted over the site.

Over the nine day period a determined and enthusiastic band of volunteers carried out the excavation of five trial trenches. Three of these trenches encountered structural evidence, locating what is thought to have been a projecting porch on the north front and the north-east corner of the building. One of the trenches was positioned to locate the southern limit of the complex and this unearthed a complex of three brick-built ovens, the largest of which is thought to have been a bread oven. The evidence from the other two trenches suggests that the site was heavily robbed at the time that the building was demolished. Any salvageable materials, including bricks, roof tiles and floor tiles, all appear to have been removed, leaving only unusable broken fragments, though having said this the excavations did recover fragments of decorated medieval floor tile and glazed roof tile. The pottery evidence from the site suggests that it may have been occupied from the late 11th or early 12th century, thus pre-dating the 1312 date of the surviving tower by several hundred years.

The project was generously funded by a grant from the Bucks Archaeological Society and also from the Bucks Historic Gardens Trust. Post excavation work is now underway and the results of the excavation will eventually be published in Records of Buckinghamshire.

Stowe New Inn

Major works on the restoration and adaptation of the New Inn at Stowe are due to commence in 2010, prior to the site opening to the public in 2011. Architects Cowper Griffiths have been appointed as the principal consultants and have progressed the scheme for looking at the adaptation and renewal of the buildings and the immediate surrounding landscape so that it can be used as the new entrance point into the gardens and park. The project will provide an exciting opportunity to 're-unite' Stowe with its original landscape, and particularly the main approach from Buckingham along the Buckingham Drive. An archaeological appraisal of the buildings and the immediate surrounding landscape was undertaken by Northamptonshire Archaeology in 2006 and we are now planning for the phase II works, which will involve a major overhaul of the buildings. The actual inn and the side ranges to the courtyard forming

the stables, kitchen, brewhouse etc are likely to be retained but the barn on the adjoining farm yard will be rebuilt, respecting the footprint and materials of the original barn. The Trust is currently preparing an archaeological strategy for these works as they will have a major impact on the buildings and their surroundings. A watching brief will be maintained over all opening-up works in the buildings and we will also have to evaluate and mitigate against the consequences of enlarging a former gravel quarry which form the main car park – anecdotally said to be the site from which an inhumation burial was recovered.

Bradenham Woods Historic Landscape Survey

A third season of survey of the earthworks in the woods at Bradenham was completed over the winter of 2007/8 and in fact we have now completed the area that formed the original project design. This is largely a volunteer based project, but under the direction of the Trust's Regional Archaeologist. Sits have been mapped using the Trust's EDM and the resulting plots have then been digitised by Oxford Archaeology. We now have about 200 sites mapped, including close to a 100 saw pits. In order to keep the survey group together and to cover the area of woodland containing known Romano-British field systems the survey is likely to be extended to at least a further season i.e. into the winter of 2008/9.

Ashridge Archaeological Survey

Much of the Trust's Ashridge estate lies in Bucks. We have been trying to complete the archaeological survey started by Angus Wainwright more than 20 years ago. The estate has been divided into nine character areas and separate reports will be produced for each of these character areas, with a tenth report providing an overall land use history. So far one of these reports have been completed and a further four reports are due for completion by the end of 2008, three of these to be produced internally, and the largest covering the Ivinghoe, Pitstone and Albury Commons to be completed by Northamptonshire Archaeology.

We are about to commission a study of the buildings at Pitstone Green Farm, which were bequeathed to the Trust several years ago.

Cliveden

The Trust have commissioned a suite of Conservation Plans to be produced for the Cliveden landscape. One of the plans will cover archaeology and landscape, the second all built structures. As part of this process Wessex Archaeology have completed an archaeological survey of the entire estate, which has identified about 150 sites, mostly earthwork traces of the 18th c. designed landscape, though the inventory also includes interesting boundary evidence for the former Taplow commons which were extinguished in the 19th century.

Gary Marshall
National Trust Archaeologist, Thames and Solent Region
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