

WEAG Chairman's Report March 2011

We have had a successful year; membership now stands at around 150 members with 11 new members this year.

John Alexander, our first President, died in August aged 88. He was active in education at both Cambridge and London, dug in Africa and Britain, and was Vice-President of Prehistoric Society. Our Vice-President Eileen Norwood died in September; her husband owned the land at Abridge, site of the Little London investigation, in which he took a keen interest. Our current President, Harvey Sheldon, retired from Birkbeck College, University of London. Bill White, who was the bone specialist of MoLA and delivered talks to WEAG, died in the autumn of 2010.

The lecture programme went well, regularly attended by over 40 members plus. We had a slight variation in March 2010: after the AGM the Excavations Committee delivered a series of talks on Copped Hall, including a wonderful account by Norah Carling of the early history of the house (see WEAG Review 2009/10). In May Harvey Sheldon addressed us on his work at Syon Park. The Rudge speaker was Irving Finkel on Babylon, where the Jewish exiles assimilated some myths from the Epic of Gilgamesh, the Flood, etc, and some of the young men stayed on as scribes. We are so grateful that Peter Huggins could talk to us on the history of early Waltham Abbey in June to cover a mix-up on dates with the planned speaker. The scheduled tour of the school had to be postponed, but we were able to explore the grounds and the remnants of Repton's work - originally the Highams Park lake was part of the estate.

Coming back in September it was too dark and overcast to see the view from the school roof, but we toured the library and other rooms. Elliott Wragg lectured on the work of Thames survey: recording finds on the foreshore, looking at the erosion and detailing timber structures revealed by the tides.

In October our member John Shepherd spoke on glass workers in Londinium recycling material that was originally manufactured in the Rhineland.

November's talk was by Tim Reynolds on the deepest Libyan Desert, which had been made fertile with elaborate underground channels as the once fertile Sahara dried up. The irrigation system was similar to the aquanauts of ancient Persia and Yemen. Not a nice area to work in oil - perhaps Gadaffi's activities are a blessing for the workers.

In December we heard about Mucking - I had dug there under the formidable Margaret Jones. A huge early Pagan Saxon cemetery on the Thames Estuary, containing inhumations and cremations, with skeletal material attacked by the acid soil, it was possibly a religious site at first.

The January Social went well, all food and drink consumed, and lots raffle prizes: John Shepherd gave a thought-provoking talk on the Roman helmet problems and the work of the Portable Antiquities Scheme.

No male speaker was allowed to come on 14 February (Valentines day), so on the 21st we had Barry Ager from the British Museum on the Viking hoard in the Vale of York, some of which is now in the BM and some is back home.

A lot of the subjects covered are written up in Current Archaeology and British Archaeology.

WEAG Chairman's Report March 2011

WEAG's Research & Excavation in 2010

Last summer we held our usual members' dig at Copped Hall in the Whit week (late May/early June); about 50 members took part. In July we tried a new training format - "Taster Weekends" for people brand-new to practical archaeology, held during the Council for British Archaeology's fortnight-long Festival of British Archaeology. We limited the number of "tasters" per weekend to 15, and easily achieved that number. In August we held two one-week Field Schools (not for beginners), aimed at increasing the pace of our work. A full summary of the results of the digs in 2010 was given in the WEAG News of last October. We will be back there again in the same months this year with the same format of a WEAG members' dig followed by Taster Weekends and Field Schools.

Work in Wanstead Park was not continued in 2010, but there are good prospects of further work in due course.

This year we are not holding a special meeting to present and discuss WEAG's practical work, but a meeting with this purpose is pencilled into the lecture programme for February 2012. We also understand that the Copped Hall Trust is planning a public meeting to review the archaeological work there in autumn 2011.

Thanks to all who have helped us throughout the year - committee members, diggers, caterers and speakers.

Let us have a good 2011 to 2012.

Gil Burn