

WEAG Chairman's Report March 2012 - 2013

We have had another busy year, with a successful digging season at Copped Hall and a good programme of lectures. We also enrolled a number of new members.

There are some changes to our set-up. First, Pat Wilkinson, one of our vice-presidents, died in July after a serious illness, which had prevented her from attending meetings for several years. Many of you knew her when processing finds at Stock Street and digging at Waltham Abbey. She was a thoughtful person and a good archaeologist, and spent many years working at the Passmore Edwards museum. In view of this Alan Cox, of the Copped Hall Trust, has been invited to become a vice president.

Secondly, after 10 years Judy Weatherly is having to give up her role as WEAG Treasurer. We would like to thank her for all the diligent work she has put in for this challenging group., and wish her all the best for the future. We look forward to electing her successor shortly.

In addition, Brian Moore has reluctantly had to relinquish the distribution of the WEAG News, this has been taken over by Andrew. Madeley.

At the AGM in March 2012 Harvey talked about the Walls of Londinium – it is amazing so much of them have survived. I am sure that many of us have been stimulated to go and find new sections; WEAG has had visits to some of them.

In April Ian Grainger talked about excavations at the site of the Royal Mint, where coins were still being made until the 1970's. It was a complicated site, with many victims of the Black Death having been found, though they are only part of the total number believed to have been buried there. It then became a short-lived monastery, followed by the first Royal Naval Victualling yard and subsequently the Mint itself.

The Rudge Lecture in May featured Chris Stringer, who is a world-wide authority on human evolution. He recently published "The Origin of Our Species" – also the title of his talk. In his inimitable way Chris considered much of the research into the origins of humanity, and discussed the relationships between Homo Sapiens and the Neanderthals. There is a wealth of evidence, from fossils to ancient DNA, that reveals the story of where we came from, how we got here and who we are.

In June, on a very wet Sunday morning, the diggers at Copped Hall had a phone call advising that the planned speaker could not come due to illness. At short notice we were very fortunate to get Ian Jones to come along and give a comprehensive talk on The Romans at Sea – particularly in covering their vessels and harbours. Thanks again to Ian for stepping in.

We opened the new season in September with John Shepherd describing the Temple of Mithras in London and the cult of Mithras. John explained the discovery of the Temple, the original archaeological work done on it, the building of the (inaccurate) replica nearby, the current building work on the site and the plans to display the remains of the Temple.

In October we had more discussion on Hominids, with Nick Ashton from the BM and how the first humans in Northern Europe conquered the cold. This covered a project examining a number of sites, including Pakefield and Happisburgh, where erosion of the soft cliffs has revealed stone tools and bones indicating the presence of man around 900,000 years ago. As it was much colder then, this prompted the examination of possible methods used by man to survive the conditions.

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Julia Farley from the BM came in November to talk about the use of coins in the Late Iron Age and post-Conquest economy. This was a fascinating insight into the complexity of coin production and how society reacts to it.

Unfortunately there was no talk in December owing to the planned speaker not being available.

The social in January went well, with a slight change to the format and quiz. Thanks to all who contributed, particularly for the excellent catering.

At the latest meeting Peter Huggins discussed the links between Waltham Abbey and the Reformation, taking into account a number of archaeological finds related to the Abbey and an unusual book about the Church that may have contributed to the public desire for Reformation. Mary Salton, a dedicated Waltham Abbey digger, also gave an interesting introduction to the background and workings of the Epping Forest District Museum, located in Sun Street.

WEAG's Research & Excavation in 2012

The member's dig, held in early June at Copped Hall, saw good progress being made in the rose garden and dove-cote trenches with at least 20 members attending each day.

The third year of the CHTAP Training Weekend digs for beginners, held to coincide with the Festival of British Archaeology, was well attended despite poor weather and competition from the Olympics. To provide interesting areas for the trainees to work, two new trenches were opened up, allowing them to experience the digging process right from the top-soil down. The two August CHTAP five-day Field Schools continued the work started in June, with around 10 diggers attending each day. The same format of digs will be followed for 2013 and we look forward to you, and others, joining us.

WEAG has continued to work with other local archaeological and historical groups, for example by providing equipment and resources to assist with surveying and excavating activities.

We will continue to meet at WCHS for talks, I hope you will enjoy the programme. In April we will have a talk on T E Lawrence and his railway around Petra, and the public Rudge Lecture in May will feature Jon Cotton on The Archaeology of The Thames.

Thanks to all who have worked for WEAG, diggers, publicity, finances, food, technology, WEAG News, admin, etc., and to the speakers who have delivered such interesting talks.

Gil Burn

Reports on the lectures are included in the regular WEAG News, and will be also be in the 2013 WEAG Review.