

WAS NEWS

The newsletter of the Welwyn Archaeological Society
Autumn 2010



Chatsworth House. *The taller section to the left was rebuilt in the 1690s on the footprint of Bess of Hardwick's original house. The remainder was added in the 1820s.*

Editorial by *Kris Lockyear, Director.*

It is my pleasure to welcome you all to the start of our new lecture season. We have a varied and interesting line-up of speakers to see us through the cold winter months ahead. I hope to see you all. As part of our lecture season we have arranged a members evening. If you would like to speak — we only want about ten to fifteen minutes — please let us know.

Our autumn trip is slightly earlier than usual this year for the simple reason that Chatsworth closes for the winter. Les Mather, who now works as a tour guide at Chatsworth, has written the article con-

tained in this newsletter and will be acting as our guide. Do sign up for this excellent opportunity to visit one of the foremost stately homes in Britain.

Members of the Society have been working on various fieldwork projects over the summer including excavation and geophysics. The major excitement has been the work near Watton-at-Stone which is ongoing. If you would like to join in with the work please get in contact, we always need extra hands and training is given.

We are using email as a way of contacting members quickly. If you haven't given us, your address yet, please do.

The next WAS outing – Chatsworth House

by our Derbyshire Correspondent

Chatsworth House, near Bakewell in Derbyshire, is one of the best known historic houses in England. Originally built in the 1550s by Bess of Hardwick and the second of her four husbands Sir William Cavendish, it was rebuilt in Baroque style in the 1690s and substantially extended in the 1820s and 30s. It remains the home of the 12th Duke of Devonshire, who is the 16th generation of the Cavendish family to live there.



A view that few visitors see. Looking along the roof of the North Wing.

Chatsworth is currently undergoing a programme of refurbishment and improvement. Much of the work inside the house is now complete, and new areas have been opened up for the first time in 2010. The final stage, which involves the house disappearing behind scaffolding for cleaning of the external stonework, is due to start at the end of the year. So now is a good time to visit, even if you have been before, and it has been decided that the next WAS coach outing on Saturday 23rd October will be to Chatsworth.

So what is there to see? In the house itself the finest rooms are perhaps the Painted Hall and Chapel from the 1690s, and the Library and Great Dining Room from the 1830s. Also the intriguing Music Room, with its 290 year old violin hanging

on the door, or is it? New additions include the Sketch Galleries, with displays of 18th century furnishings, precious jewellery and 20th century art, and the Oak Stairs, with its lantern window visible for the first time since being hidden by a false ceiling in the 1920s. For this year only there is a special exhibition marking the 90th birthday of Deborah Devonshire, now the Dowager Duchess, the present Duke's mother and last survivor of the famous Mitford Sisters. There is a set route through the house taking in around 35 rooms, with lift access available to all floors if needed. Photography, including the use of flash but not tripods, is allowed throughout the house.

The richly decorated stable block, just uphill from the main house, now contains the main cafe and shops. It was designed in the 1760s by James Paine, the architect of Bocket Hall, and originally held 80 horses with staff accommodation and granaries above.



James Paine's stable block from the 1760s, and Joseph Paxton's Conservative Wall from the 1840s.

The gardens cover 105 acres. Nothing survives from Bess of Hardwick's original formal garden, but several features remain from the 1st Duke's 1690's water garden. Later additions include work by Joseph Paxton, Chatsworth's famous head gardener, including the 90 metre Emperor

Fountain and the remains of the Great Conservatory. This huge greenhouse was demolished in 1920, and was the prototype for Paxton's best known achievement, the Crystal Palace. The WAS visit also coincides with a temporary exhibition of modern sculpture in the gardens, organised by Sotheby's the auctioneers. All the pieces are for sale, assuming you have a large enough back garden and bank balance!



A challenge for any WAS tuba players? One of the modern sculptures on temporary exhibition in the gardens.

The surrounding parkland was landscaped by Capability Brown in the 1760s, and the autumn colours should be at their best for our visit. If there is time a stroll around the attractive estate village of Edensor (pronounced Enza), half a mile away across the park, is recommended. Also nearby, although perhaps of less interest to WAS members, is a farmyard and adventure playground aimed mainly at younger visitors.

But what about archaeology? The house is liberally sprinkled with Egyptian, Greek and Roman sculpture, mostly collected during the 19th century. Also on display this year only is the Devonshire Parure, an elaborate collection of jewellery which includes nearly 40 engraved gems from the ancient world. In the gardens you will find a Roman altar and tomb, and extensive areas of medieval ridge and furrow survive in the park. There are also numerous prehistoric barrows, cairns and stone circles on the moorland above the house, though these are

mostly small and are better visited in the winter or spring when less hidden by vegetation.

Chatsworth is a little further than some of our recent outings, so departure will be 30 minutes earlier than usual at 08.30 from Welwyn Civic Centre and 08.40 from behind Welwyn Garden City police station. This will allow us time to stop on the way and still arrive before lunch. The cost of the outing includes admission to the house and gardens. Unfortunately there is no discount for National Trust or English Heritage members, but there is a discount for senior citizens. Meals and snacks are available in the stables and the gardens.

On arrival at Chatsworth you will be free to explore as you wish. However one of our members, Les Mather, works at Chatsworth and has arranged a couple of optional extras for those who are interested. The first is a 90 minute guided tour of the house, meeting straight after lunch. This must be booked in advance as Les needs to know numbers, and there may be a small charge (£2 maximum) payable on the day. The sec-



An 1890s view of Joseph Paxton's Great Conservatory, demolished in 1920. (Photo copyright Chatsworth House Trust, reproduced with permission).

ond option, later in the afternoon and aimed at the more energetic, is a walk around the gardens to seek out the remains of Paxton's Great Conservatory and to explain how some of the water features work. This will

Fieldwork in the WADS area

Kris Lockyear

Recent fieldwork by the Society in the WADs (Watton, Aston and Datchworth) area has resulted in an exciting find which is likely to become a major focus for our work over the next few years. It is worth, however, rewinding the story to the beginning.

Back in the 1970s John Wallace, Honorary Member and long time supporter of the Society, picked up an amphora sherd on one of his fields and took it to St. Albans museum. Great excitement ensued as the sherd pre-dated the Roman invasion of AD 43 and was thought to be an indication of an important Iron Age site nearby. A small one man excavation was carried out by the British Museum in the depths of winter. John remembers giving Tony Pacitto coffee and thawing him out by the fire. This small



Figure 3: Excavations undertaken by Tony Rook in 2008.



Figure 1: Bronze wax spatula handle found by Andy Wight.

excavation turned up nothing much of note, and in fact the British Museum now has no records of the dig ever having taken place.

This is site 4b in the map published in our Winter 2005 newsletter.

Now let us fast forward to 2005/2006. Andy Wight of the North Herts Charity Metal Detector Club began metal detecting in Cartway, the site marked 4a on the map. Andy started finding quite a remarkable set of Iron Age, Roman and Medieval artefacts

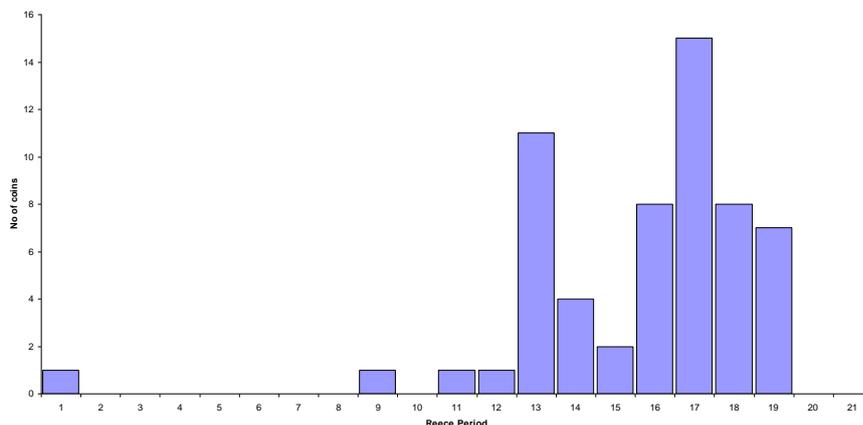


Figure 2: Distribution of coins by date found by Andy Wight. The periods are those used by Richard Reece. Periods 13/14 are the late third century, periods 16-21 are the fourth century.

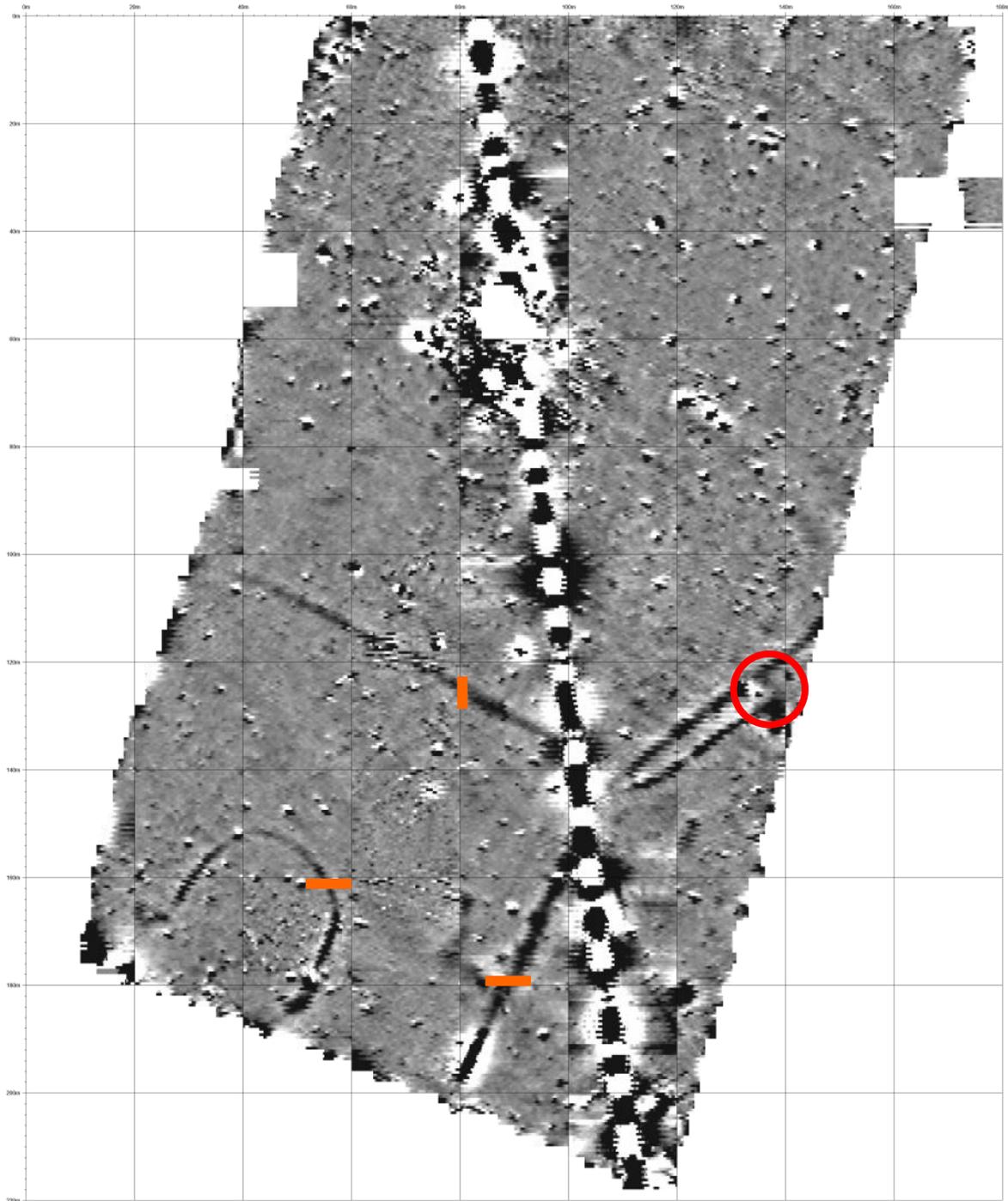


Figure 4: Magnetometry survey undertaken in the Spring of 2010. The strong black and white line represents an old water pipe. The black lines are ditches. The red circle indicates the approximate location of the 2008 trenches and the orange lines the position of the 2010 trenches. The grid consists of 20m squares, north to the top of the plot.

originally reported in our Spring 2006 newsletter. By June of this year he had registered 135 objects with the Portable Antiquities Scheme including many Roman coins and a copper-alloy wax spatula handle of Roman date. The handle takes the form a

three-dimensional bust of Minerva (Figure 1). The coins recovered include one Iron Age issue, but the Roman series is much like most rural sites in Britannia, apart from being slightly more prolific than many (Figure 2).

In 2007 I was asked to teach a one day course on geophysics for Master's students at the Institute of Archaeology. Although the field Andy was searching was under crop, the pasture next door was available and so we spent a day undertaking some magnetometry and resistance survey. Bryan Scott later went back and completed the res work. This limited survey discovered two linear features running across the site, possi-



Figure 5: The crew watch Lewis Orchard at work in Trench 2 (well it was tea break!).

bly ditches. While I was away in the summer of 2008 Tony and the gang dug two long trenches to locate these ditches one of which contained Iron Age pottery, and one of which contained some Roman pottery (Figure 3).

This Spring I was again asked to teach a field school in geophysics and surveying. We again returned to the pasture and extended our survey. Some more features started to show up and so we returned to the field whenever the magnetometer was available, and have now completed almost the entire field (Figure 4). Much to our excitement we have found a large rectangular enclosure with a smaller horseshoe shaped feature in the middle. The two ditches originally found were seen again. The very harsh black/white line running diagonally across the plan is an old defunct waterpipe. Of course, Murphy's law dictates that the

pipe should run across the junction of the new enclosure and the two original ditches masking the pattern in the archaeology.

Bryan Scott's excellent idea of using pieces of steel scaffold pole hammered flush into the ground as permanent survey points has worked extremely well meaning that we can relocate any point within our survey with accuracy. In fact, when we were replacing grid pegs we often found the remains of older pegs still in the ground! Thanks to Tim Sly of the University of Southampton, our permanent survey points now have high accuracy OS coordinates as well.

In order to investigate these features further, we are in the process of excavating three 5 by 1m test trenches shown in Figure 4 in orange. Obviously, these three trenches are placed to examine the three new features. Trench 1, which isn't all that deep yet, has contained Roman pottery and a few tiny scraps of samian pottery tentatively identified by Clare as early South Gaulish samian. Trench 2 is the most advanced of our trenches and we have excavated a ditch which contained, mainly in its upper fills, late Iron Age grog tempered pottery along with a piece of amphora handle and a piece of Verulamium ware. The amphora is possibly an early Spanish example (Figure 6). The final trench across the horseshoe shaped feature revealed a charcoal and bone rich layer with yet more Iron Age pottery. We are now trying to decide if the heavy clay underlying this layer is another ditch fill. Unfortunately, the clay subsoil in this field makes for difficult digging and is acidic which means the bone is in poor preservation. We have had, however, an antler from Trench 3 and a cow's jaw from Trench 2 along with other bones.

So what is this site? It is difficult to be definitive with these various bits and pieces of evidence and I am ever cautious. What I will say is that the site closest in plan to our geophysics is the Iron Age phase of the temple at Hayling Island in Essex. The only problem is that our site is at least four times larger!



Figure 6: Some of the finds from Trench 2 after they had been washed.

There are many unanswered questions. Are all the ditches of the same date despite their varied fills? Why is there no late Roman material here whereas in the field next door Andy has found lots of late Roman finds? How does this site relate to Lower Rivers Field, Great Humphreys and all the rest? So many things to investigate.

We need to finish these trenches off before the winter weather sets in. Anybody willing to come out and help dig are asked to contact Clare Lewis. As always, we will be sending emails around with details of dates and times.

WAS on the web

The Society's webpage is still in abeyance until either we get a volunteer to create it, or I have the time to do so! Meanwhile, however, Burcu Urundel has created a Facebook page for us. If you are a Facebook fan search for "Welwyn Archaeology Society".

Something to say?

The Director is always looking for new copy for the newsletter. If you have anything you would like to write about, please get in touch!

IMPORTANT!

If you have not paid your subscription for 2010–2011 could you please do so as soon as possible? Subs are only £12 single or £18 family. If you haven't paid for last year, we will happily take money for both

Lecture Programme 2010-2011

2010

Sept 24th 'The archaeology in Letchworth Garden Village' by *Keith Matthews*.

Oct 8th 'The Glass Workers of Roman London' by *Angela Wardle*.

Oct 22nd 'Recent Work of the Thames Discovery' by *Gustav Milne*.

Nov 5th 'Up the Nile- without a paddle' by *Tony Rook*.

Nov 26th 'Egyptian and Greek Science' by *Chris Woolston*.

2011

Jan 28th 'Exploring a legionary Fortress: Recent excavations at Caerleon', by *Andrew Gardner*.

Feb 11th 'Boudicca' by *John Smith*.

Feb 25th *Members Evening*.

Mar 11th 'Recent work in Saxon London - New Aspects, New Questions' by *Lynn Blackmoor*.

Mar 25th A.G.M and *The Things we did*

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take about an hour and will involve some fairly steep paths and steps. No booking is required for this and a time and meeting place will be announced on the day.

More information about Chatsworth and its past and present residents can be found online at <http://www.chatsworth.org/> and on the Wikipedia pages entitled Chatsworth House and Duke of Devonshire. It should be an interesting outing to an attractive part of the country, and we encourage you to join us on 23rd October.

Welwyn Roman Baths

Members will be well aware of the baths housed in a vault under the A1(M). Recently, however, the displays at the baths have had a facelift. The work, undertaken by Welwyn Hatfield Museum Service, has greatly improved what is known in the jargon as “the visitor experience”. The entrance tunnel has been re-paved in a pleasant geometric design and edged with some of the many tiles recovered during the excavations (Figure 1). The new displays contain some of the best finds both from the baths

and locally including one of the skeletons from the Hawbush (‘School’) Close site (Figure 2). There are facilities for the young to dress as a Roman, and a reproduction of one of the Verulamium mosaics (Figure 3). All this adds to the baths themselves, along with their permanent occupants (Figure 4). The only criticism I have is the odd way the skeleton has been laid out. Remember that one of the benefits of WAS membership is free entrance to the baths.



Figure 1:
the entrance tunnel.



Figure 2:
the new displays.

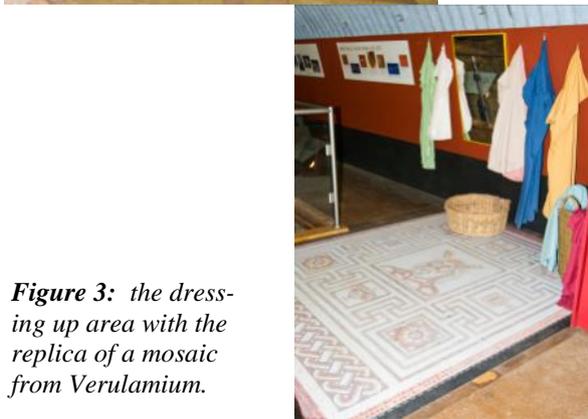


Figure 3: the dressing up area with the replica of a mosaic from Verulamium.



Figure 4: The view along the baths.

Other Fieldwork

Two smaller pieces of fieldwork were undertaken by the Society this summer. The first was a resistance survey of the garden of the Manor in Welwyn. Roman Welwyn continues to be somewhat of a mystery as



we have found a fair number of burials such as the mausoleum and the burials at Hawbush Close, but where, exactly, is



the town? One suggestion is that it may be on the western side of the river under the manor house. We were kindly given permission to undertake a resistance survey there, but small scale surveys in gardens are hard to interpret! Any ideas anyone?

The other piece of work was a CORS test pit. We need more sites in Welwyn. Any volunteers?