The last twelve months have been a busy period for the Berkshire Archaeology team, with ever-increasing numbers of planning applications, a wide range of enquiries to the Historic Environment Record (HER), and many archaeological and research projects taking place within our area needing our team’s specialist input and advice.

A number of strategic sites for housing and other redevelopment are under consideration, as the economy of our area continues to grow; many of these affect heritage assets across the full range of the historic environment, such as the listed and scheduled site at the former Reading Prison, where investigations are ongoing. We are also working with the Environment Agency to advise on the River Thames Scheme, to provide flood relief within the catchment through major works in the Datchet area, planners and contractors for Highways England on the upgrading of the M4 to a “smart” motorway, and with the High Speed 2 team to mitigate any impacts from ancillary works associated with the planned new railway.

We have also been working with Museum of London Archaeology to advise on their production of a Terrestrial Minerals Resource Assessment, which considers the archaeological potential of important sand, gravel and other potential quarrying areas, to aid planning and advice on recording and/or conserving the most significant archaeology. A report and seminar are expected later this year, as well as a set of enhanced records for the HER.

You will find details of a selection of recent sites and finds within the following pages, but don’t forget you can view our HERonline through the Heritage Gateway www.heritagegateway.org.uk to find out more, or to discover the archaeology on your doorstep.

We have also launched our new webpage - go to www.berkshirearchaeology.org.uk to see our brand new look, and don’t forget to check back regularly for updates on our work! We hope you enjoy our newsletter.

Berkshire Archaeology is an archaeological advice service for;
In the last year large soil bunds have appeared just before Junction 5 for Langley as you drive along the M4 towards London. These mark the early stages of a 40ha gravel quarry on land north of the Motorway, close to Ditton Park. The Motorway was built in the late 1960s and early 1970s with only very limited rescue excavations undertaken by a valiant band of local societies and groups, volunteers and a small number of professional archaeologists. We therefore know little about the archaeology that was under the M4 at this point.

However the stripping and archaeological investigation of this new gravel quarry is providing evidence of what might have been lost when the Motorway was built. The investigations by Wessex Archaeology on behalf of CEMEX UK are revealing a buried landscape of prehistoric and Roman archaeology. A series of Bronze Age and Roman ditched field systems are coming to light. A timber-lined water hole, probably dug to provide water for livestock, was recorded in one field. Surprisingly a human skull was found at its base; a curious discovery, perhaps deliberately deposited to mark the end of the useful life of this water hole. Fields and associated water holes were ubiquitous in the later prehistoric period in this part of Berkshire and demonstrate how intensively this part of Berkshire was farmed in antiquity.

Interestingly there has also been a high number of Neolithic (4,000 – 2,000 BC) pits recorded. These small, shallow pits were not associated with any monuments but were more likely all that remains of small habitations. Some pits contained ‘Grooved Ware’ pottery, an apt description for this very distinctive type of pottery. A particularly exciting discovery was the remains of a person, buried in a flexed position, possibly tied or bound when buried. No artefacts were recovered but the burial is typical of the Early Bronze Age (2,000 – 1,600 BC). The archaeological investigations are due to continue for several years as the quarry progresses.
Walter George Thornton Smith, collector, antique dealer, connoisseur of European furniture, and sometime chairman of the board of Fortnum and Masons, died on Sunday 24 February 1963 at the age of 87. One of his last wishes was that his house, Shoppenhanger’s Manor on the outskirts of Maidenhead, should be used as a retirement home, perhaps for civil servants. His house was no ordinary suburban home but a replica of a medieval manor house, built under his instruction in the second decade of the 20th century. It was built as a pastiche of a 16th-century merchant’s house, using reclaimed items from elsewhere, including carved timber and panelling from Billingbear Park, a ceiling from a medieval inn at Banbury and painted glass from Selby Abbey. The interior was also richly furnished and included C‘hand Hi Chinese wallpaper, a magnificent collection of Chelsea, Bow and Derby china and 16th-century Brussels tapestries. Thornton Smith built his edifice on the foundations of what he considered to be the original medieval Shoppenhanger’s manor house. The original building is shown on the 1844 Parish of Bray Tithe map but it is not clear from cartographic and documentary sources if this was the site of a medieval manor house.

While Thornton Smith’s faux manor house has since been demolished, archaeological investigations at the site in 2016 by Cotswold Archaeology have surprisingly shown that the house sat within a Roman, rather than medieval, enclosure.

The enclosure was defined by two large ditches, full of Roman pottery and tile. This Roman material was almost certainly derived from a Roman building, perhaps even a Roman villa, close to the site of the manor house. There is no doubt that Thornton Smith would have been delighted to know that his grand house was built on a Roman foundation, even if there is some doubt as to the medieval origins of the site.

Unfortunately his last wish for his house to become a retirement home did not come to pass. After a brief spell as a film set for The Persuaders and at least two low budget horror films in the 1960s, the house was bought by and incorporated into the adjacent Hotel becoming a successful restaurant and wedding venue until its demolition in 2006.
Excavations by Oxford Archaeology in 2016 as part of a new housing development in Shinfield, south of Reading, have revealed a changing pattern of prehistoric and later land-use stretching back to the late Neolithic period (3,000 – 2,000 BC).

Located on a slight plateau above the floodplain of the River Lodden, the remains of an early Bronze Age (2,000 – 1,500 BC) round barrow have proved to be quite intriguing. The barrow ditch encircled a central pit that had been dug into a silted-up tree hole. Within the pit was a complete, up-turned early Bronze Age collared urn, so-called because of its distinctive ‘collar’ that would have provided a means of carrying the vessel as well as a form of decoration. A second un-urned cremation burial was also identified just to the north, possibly representing a later burial. Although excavation of the surrounding barrow ditch produced few finds (worked flints and sherds of early prehistoric pottery), a notable element was the presence of burnt material, possibly the remains of tree branches, which had been deliberately placed in the fills of the ditch.

It seems that the tree (or its remains) became the focal point of the barrow and the cremation burial. The charred remains from the barrow ditch may have derived from the cremation pyre or the burning of the central tree.

Further dating and analysis will help to establish the relationship between the cremation burial and the charred remains within the ditch.

This ceremonial landscape, which also included scattered pits and postholes, seems to have been transformed during the mid to late Bronze Age (1,500 – 800 BC) into an agricultural landscape of drove ways, field systems and enclosures. Although no evidence for dwellings was found, the presence of four-post structures, waterholes and pits, along with notable concentrations of finds from several pits, suggests that the settlement lay within or very close to the site.
Over 110 monument records have been added to the Berkshire Archaeology Historic Environment Record (HER) database in the last year, bringing the total to more than 7,000.

The archaeological discoveries highlighted in this newsletter will all be added to the HER, but our new records don’t just include buried archaeology - nor nationally important sites - assets of local importance are important too. Two main transport routes cross through our region: The Great Western Railway (GWR) from London Paddington, through Reading, to the west and beyond and The Great Bath Road (A4) from London to Bristol. Both are important parts in the economic development of the area. Many milestones line the Bath Road from Slough in the east through to Reading in the west, such as this early 19th-century milepost on the A4 at Reading.

On the Henley Road to the north of Reading can be seen a late 1930s bus shelter. In 2015 it was repaired and re-painted in the original maroon and cream livery of the Reading Transport Company. The terminus was nearby for motor buses returning to Reading.

Across east Berkshire are War Memorials commemorating those that have been involved in WWI, WWII and more recent conflicts. The ‘Requiem’ monument by local sculptor Eric Stanford recognises volunteers from Reading who fought in the Spanish Civil War (1936-39). It is a double-faced sculpture depicting three male dead soldiers on one side and a woman with a dying child on the other, which represents the death of the young Spanish republic. The monument bears the names of the three Reading men who died in Spain - George Middleton, William Ball and Archibald Francis, and the badges of the international brigades they fought for. Originally unveiled in May 1990 in front of the former Reading Borough Council Civic Centre, it has recently been relocated to the Forbury Gardens.

These are just a few examples of the wide range of heritage assets recorded. If you are aware of an interesting monument which we don’t have on the HER or have any new information on existing monuments, please contact us with the details.
Amen Corner lies in the south-west corner of the parish of Binfield between Wokingham and Bracknell. The name, depicted as a small hamlet on the Binfield Tithe Map of 1839, is thought to derive from the saying of prayers during the beating of the bounds, the ancient custom of walking the boundaries of the parish to share the knowledge of the land and to pray for its protection.

North-west of Amen Corner, close to the line of the B3408, is the highest point within the parish, with commanding views to the north and south. It is a location that one would anticipate would have been settled in antiquity. This proved to be the case when archaeological investigations were undertaken in 2016 by Worcestershire Archaeology revealing the buried remains of an Iron Age (800 – 200 BC) settlement. Just on the north side of the hilltop, excavations revealed the remains of a large, deep ditch, enclosing a single large round house. Little of this Iron Age house survived but a large quantity of domestic rubbish, mostly broken pieces of pottery, was recovered from the eastern half of the building with little from the western half. The inference is that the eastern half of the roundhouse was for living and the western half was for sleeping. At 10m in diameter or a floor area of 78 square metres, the building was probably the home of a single extended family. Subsistence farming was likely to have been the main occupation of the household.

Interestingly a high number of loom weights were recovered from the farmstead with little evidence for the growing of cereals. Sheep farming and weaving may therefore have played an important role in the life of the farm. In addition evidence of metalworking was recorded, including deposits of slag and fragments of possible crucible, the pottery vessels holding metal as they were being melted.

It is also interesting that several Iron Age farms nearby were not enclosed but lay within open fields. It may be that the residents of the farmstead at Amen Corner, by virtue of the site’s elevated location, deep enclosure ditch and specialist metal-working evidence, held a higher position in the local later prehistoric farming community.
In the last 18 months, Berkshire Archaeology’s Finds Liaison Officer, David Williams, has been busy assisting in the recovery of the nationally important Viking hoard at Watlington, South Oxfordshire, which received national coverage (http://www.britishmuseum.org/about_us/news_and_press/press_releases/2016/the_watlington_hoard.aspx).

David had the good fortune to have this exciting find reported to him by the metal detectorist that discovered the hoard. He has also authored a book on 50 important objects from the Portable Antiquities Scheme in Surrey (http://www.exploringsurreyspast.org.uk/archaeological-finds-surrey/50findsfromsurrey/) where he also fulfils the role of Finds Liaison Officer.

Meanwhile objects recovered in east Berkshire continue to be reported to David. These include a Roman copper alloy figurine of a naked child or Cupid. This charming item was found near the village of Waltham St Lawrence. Similar figurines are known from Britain, especially the north of England, although this figure is chubbier than others. A stunningly beautiful gold solidus of Valentinian I (AD 364-75) was found near Arborfield, Wokingham. Valentinian’s stylised face appears on one side of the coin, while he is depicted in military attire on the reverse. The coin was minted in Trier, Germany, on the banks of the River Moselle.

Objects reported to the Finds Liaison Officer are not just restricted to those of great antiquity but include more recent objects of intrinsic interest. One recent example is a large 17th-century copper-alloy cloak button found near Charvil, Wokingham. The button has spirally-formed petals and alternating cells of white, blue and red enamel. Each petal is separated by a scrolling tendril. The button is domed with a central boss and has a squashed rectangular integral attachment loop on the back. This is an example of the so-called Stuart enamels. A second example is an early 17th-century copper-alloy toy musket with a fishtail butt and a faceted barrel. The upper three facets of the barrel are decorated with a sinuous line of punched circles. This small object is only a little over 7cm long and was found in White Waltham parish.
‘Oaklands’ was a large Victorian ‘villa’ built in 1876 along the Bath Road, Reading; at that time on the rural fringe of the town. This fine building was also, for a while, the home of Herbert Sutton, a member of the Sutton Seeds dynasty, and the house remained in the Sutton family until the 1920s. It was subsequently sold to the Presentation Brothers, a Catholic Congregation of Religious Brothers, and turned into a Presentation College, an independent college for boys. Alumni of the College in Reading include Michael Bond, the creator of Paddington Bear, Mike Oldfield, creator of the seminal ‘Tubular Bells’ and Lawrie Sanchez, scorer of the winning goal for Wimbledon in the FA Cup final of 1988!

The College became the Elvian School for a short period in the 2000s, but the closure of the School precipitated the residential development of the site, with the loss of the school buildings, including ‘Oaklands’.

However excavations by Thames Valley Archaeological Services in 2016 have shown that the site was home to an Iron Age community, long before its use as a house and school. The excavation revealed a settlement complex comprising a ditched trackway, attached to which were enclosures, encircling a series of roundhouses. The repair and replacement of some of the roundhouses indicates the longevity of the settlement, perhaps for over a century.

The settlement lies on free-draining soils on a low ridge above the valley of the River Kennet, an ideal location to take advantage of a range of resources and habitats. Analysis of the results is currently on-going and will help us understand the history and economy of this important settlement.
As a consequence, AOC Archaeology undertook a survey and recording exercise of the former TRL structures prior to their demolition. The work was funded by Legal and General, with the historic environment aspects managed by RPS Consulting Services. Set within a pinewood forest was an extraordinary abandoned landscape of mock motorways, roads, embankments, traffic signs and barriers, creating an eerie 'post-apocalyptic' world in this corner of Berkshire! The structures recorded by AOC included an enormous circular ‘skid pan’, overlooked by a wooden observation tower; a figure-of-8 road track, including sections of a three lane motorway with overhead gantries and signs, a banked turn reminiscent of Brooklands racing circuit and a road over an artificially steep hill. Other recorded structures included a Dynamic Impact Test Facility and a powered crash strip, cycle lanes, a variety of test sheds and other structures.

Many might consider these later 20th-century structures as barely representing ‘archaeological’ remains. However there is increasing interest and research into the early history of the car and associated buildings and infrastructure. The record of the structures at the former TRL will therefore be available to future researchers of this dominant aspect of modern life.
In AD 410, Roman military, political, and administrative control of Britain came to an end. This date marked a significant watershed for major Roman towns and society’s elite but this was less of a traumatic event for those in the rural population who witnessed gradual change before and after this date. This included the colonisation of land by Saxons migrating into Britain from central Europe from the 5th century AD onwards.

Saxon settlements are recognisably different to those of the Roman period, and one such settlement was recently recorded in the south of Slough, near Upton Court Park. Excavations by Thames Valley Archaeological Services in 2016 revealed more of a Saxon settlement that had partly been recorded in 2013 on the same site. This settlement was made up of at least five distinctive buildings known as ‘sunken-featured buildings’.

These consisted of shallow hollows with supporting posts at either end or in each corner, supporting a timber frame and ‘tent-like’ thatched roof. The exact nature and purpose of these small buildings is not fully understood. They may have served as workshops or stores rather than dwellings.

Broken pottery was recovered from these Saxon buildings.

Some sherds of pottery still had burnt food remains stuck to them, possibly the reason why the pot was thrown away. The biggest surprise of the project was the date recovered from these food remains through radiocarbon dating. This was a date most likely of between AD 322 and AD 387. This intriguingly suggests that Saxon colonisation, at least along the Thames valley, may have been well under way significantly before the official end of Roman rule.
In the last two years researchers from the University of Reading have been investigating the origins of some of England’s ‘round mounds’, the large monumental earthworks that are a regular feature of our historic landscape. (Please access their website for further information at https://roundmoundsproject.wordpress.com.) The Neolithic mound at Silbury Hill is the most well-known and most spectacular, not least because of its extraordinary age and size. The exciting discovery that the ‘Marlborough Mound’, the large earthen mound in the grounds of Marlborough College, Wiltshire, and always considered to have been built as a motte in the medieval period, had also originated in the Neolithic period, provided one of the reasons for the initiation of the project. Do other large mounds, frequently interpreted as medieval mottes, have a more ancient and different origin? Dr Jim Leary of the University of Reading said ‘this is such an exciting project for me. I have always had a fascination with large earthen mounds and it is a privilege to have the opportunity to change our understanding of some of these monuments and to discover that their history is far more complex than was first thought’.

Two round mounds in east Berkshire have been selected for investigation by the University of Reading. Montem Mound in Slough, south of Salt Hill, is a Scheduled Monument and is interpreted as a medieval motte. The Mound is 28m in diameter and at least 6m high. Forbury Hill, in Forbury Gardens, Reading, is also a Scheduled Monument. It is thought to have been constructed in the 12th century as a motte and later re-used and remodelled during the Civil War. The mound was then remodelled again when it was incorporated into the 19th-century pleasure gardens of Forbury Gardens. The University’s researchers have investigated these two mounds by boring a small diameter auger through the mound material. They have then analysed the deposits with the aim of recovering material for radiocarbon dating from the base of the monuments.

Hard work for those involved but highly rewarding as the results will hopefully provide a definitive date for the origin of each monument.

At the time of writing, the results from Forbury Hill and Montem Mound are awaited! We will provide an update in next year’s Newsletter! Fiona MacDonald, Principal Archaeologist with Berkshire Archaeology said ‘we are delighted to have been able to facilitate The University of Reading’s research into two of our more enigmatic monuments. The results are important in themselves but will help the appreciation of these ancient monuments’.
Renovations in autumn 2015 to the former Blarney Stone Public House, now the Queen Charlotte, Church Lane, Windsor, resulted in the excavation by Thames Valley Archaeological Services of some 37 burials that presumably once lay within the graveyard of the adjacent church of St John the Baptist. The burials, not all of which were complete, were thought to date from the mid-16th-century onwards. The current church dates to the 19th century but occupies the site of an earlier, medieval church. Presumably these burials lay within the grounds of the original churchyard, which has since been encroached upon by buildings fronting Church Lane.

During resurfacing work in Eton College in summer 2016, workmen recovered a stoneware vessel containing seven polished stone marbles. The vessel was a ‘blacking bottle’, originally containing liquid for blacking boots, ovens, stoves and other items. It was made between 1831 and 1834 by Stephen Green of Lambeth. The marbles are made of layered limestone with one possibly of low grade marble. Such marbles are known from the 17th century onwards and are likely to have been manufactured on the continent. It was not until the second half of the 19th century that they were replaced by glass marbles. The vessel and its marbles seem to have been deliberately hidden, and never recovered. Similar marbles are known from other archaeological excavations but this is the first group deliberately buried in a container.

Caversham War Memorial stands proudly overlooking the River Thames. It was unveiled on the 5th May 1928 in honour of the 260 members of the local community who lost their lives in the First World War. The monument is an octagonal stone column or obelisk, simple but powerful in design. Like many other such monuments, it is currently not listed but is being considered for statutory protection by Historic England as part of their First World War Commemoration Project. Whether eventually listed or not, the monument will continue to be included on Berkshire Archaeology’s Historic Environment Record as an important asset of the heritage of Caversham and Reading.