It has been a very successful year for our newly expanded team, and for archaeological discovery and conservation within each of the five unitary authorities of east Berkshire.

We are reporting on exciting new finds across the area, following an extremely busy period for fieldwork, with geophysical surveys, trial trenching, excavations and research projects mostly relating to new development, but often also as a result of research by local groups.

Some of the highlights are discussed here, but dozens more new records have been added to our Historic Environment Record; for more information on local sites or what’s new in your area, you can search online on the Heritage Gateway or contact us direct (see page 3) to learn more about the services we offer.

As well as working locally, Berkshire Archaeology is involved in a number of England-wide initiatives, to make sure that east Berkshire’s archaeology is fully represented in the national picture. Data from our Historic Landscape Characterisation project (see page 6) has been provided to a national landscape assessment scheme, and case studies from important east Berkshire sites are cited in various new and forthcoming publications, including the sector’s recent celebration of the anniversary of archaeological planning guidance, leading to the Historic England publication “Building the Future, Transforming our Past”.

We hope you enjoy our newsletter.

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The need to cater for the increase in the numbers of youngsters needing a place at primary schools in Reading provided the opportunity for archaeological investigations in 2014 and 2015 in the grounds of Ridgeway Primary School in south Reading. Plans by Reading Borough Council to increase classroom space and create a new all-weather sports pitch led to archaeological investigations in 2014 and 2015 by Thames Valley Archaeological Services.

The school lies on the shoulder of a high ridge with commanding views westwards over the Kennet Valley and the Foudry Brook. It seemed the type of location that might have been settled in the past and settlement evidence soon came to light. Remains of both Bronze Age and Roman settlements were revealed during stripping of the footprints of the new buildings and sports pitch. Both the remains of Bronze Age houses and field boundaries were recorded, filled with typical domestic rubbish. There was also evidence for a series of intercutting pits, filled with huge quantities of burnt flint. These lay close to the spring line suggesting that these deposits may be the remains of a ‘burnt mound’, a Bronze Age sauna or cooking area.

The greatest surprise was the discovery, buried at a shallow depth, of a Roman clay pot filled with bronze Roman coins. This hoard of coins dates to the late 3rd century AD as the c. 300 bronze coins all date to this time. They were buried at a time of crisis and never recovered, for a reason we will never know. Most hoards are found away from the house or settlement of their owner but at the School ditches and pits containing Roman pottery and other remains were found close by so the hoard was buried on the fringe of a Roman farm. After detailed examination and conservation, the hoard will be acquired by Reading Museum.

The exciting discovery of the Roman coin hoard enthused the School and its pupils, who were thrilled to know that their School was only the very latest of a long history of activity at this location. The opportunity was therefore taken in conjunction with Reading Museum to use the schoolchildren’s enthusiasm to teach them more about the history and archaeology of their school.

Therefore, shortly after the discovery, Euan Affleck, Learning Officer at Reading Museum, attended the School to present to an assembly about the archaeological work which had been undertaken. The school was terrifically excited by the excavation and spoke of a ‘lasting legacy, so it was with this in mind that the assembly was developed.
Entitled ‘Does the Past Matter?’, the assembly explored why the past is important, drawing upon pictures of the school taken in 1948, placed alongside pictures of the same images taken from the present day to help them with context. The children were introduced to the fact that there had been people already living in the area of their school for many thousands of years and now the school had the opportunity to share this with the rest of Reading, thereby sharing the legacy of the area. They were fascinated by the update that Euan was able to provide about the story of the hoard and what was happening to the Roman coins. There was also an opportunity for some of the children to dress in Iron Age and Roman costume and handle objects from the School Loans Service.

The pupils were thrilled with what they experienced and the school expressed a desire to receive further updates from Reading Museum on the ongoing work on the archaeological discoveries at the school so that this can be the subject of future assemblies, other events or displays. This represents a very good example of the public benefits of archaeology; its educational value and the contribution it can make to a sense of place and community identity. There may even be some archaeologists of the future amongst the young pupils of the Ridgeway Primary School!
An Update on Berkshire Archaeology’s Historic Environment Record (HER)

The Berkshire Archaeology Historic Environment Record (HER) is a database containing records of all known archaeological sites and monuments, findspots, buildings, designations (Listed Buildings, Scheduled Monuments and Registered Parks and Gardens) and archaeological interventions across our five unitary authorities in the east of Berkshire. Many readers will be aware that the HER has developed over the years and there are now over 6,800 monuments, 8,900 finds records, 23,000 sources and 2,100 records of archaeological works held on the database.

New records are continually being added to the database, reflecting the archaeological investigations undertaken in our area. Non-designated buildings are also now included, for example many buildings from Bearwood Park at Arborfield have been added. In the last two years a total of 155 new monument and finds spots records have been added covering all periods from the Palaeolithic through to the modern. Two very interesting monuments of more recent date are an Anderson Shelter in the village of Sonning (Monument record MRM17555) and a pedestal for a spigot mortar discovered in Slough (Monument record MRM17577). Over the same period, over 250 records of archaeological work have been compiled.

Anyone can consult the HER. The types of enquiries we receive range from members of the public doing personal research to academic enquiries for graduate and post-graduate research, and enquiries of a commercial nature from consultants, planners and archaeological units. A charge is applicable for our commercial HER search service, but for all other users the data can be accessed for free.

As you can see from the graph above, in 2014-2015, the largest group of people contacting the HER were commercial, followed by educational researchers and other researchers and the public. However, we know that for personal research many users will be accessing archaeological data by other means such as the Heritage Gateway.

We now have an on-line presence and publish our full monuments records via the Heritage Gateway website http://www.heritagegateway.org.uk. Feedback indicates that many people choose to use this useful research tool to initially gather data and then contact the HER for any further information or assistance they may require. Archaeological information covering east Berkshire is available to search by period, type or within a geographical area and the HER records are updated on a six monthly basis. Alongside the Berkshire Archaeology HER there is also access to an increasing number of other heritage resources across England, including all the designated heritage assets on the National Heritage List for England.

We continue to welcome visitors to our office at the Berkshire Record Office during our Open House every Thursday afternoon (between 12.00 and 4.00pm). It is an opportunity to view the HER database alongside the HER Officer, to find out about the archaeology of east Berkshire, or simply to meet the Berkshire Archaeology team and learn more about what we do. If you can please phone us before your visit on 01189 375976 to let us know when you are planning to arrive so we can prepare for your visit in advance.

Excavating a Bronze Age wattle-lined water hole near Colnbrook © Thames Valley Archaeological Services
Berkshire has previously revealed significant evidence for ancient metalworking, despite not having obvious sources of raw material. A very early site of iron working was found in 1988 at Dunstan Park, Thatcham, dated to the Early Iron Age (9th – 7th century BC), and an important Late Saxon (9th – 10th century AD) iron-smelting and smithing site was found in Wraysbury in 1980.

Excavations between 2013 and 2014 at two sites have added significant new information to our existing knowledge of ancient metalworking in the region. Geophysical survey and exploratory trenching at Castleview Road, Slough, indicated the presence of a previously unknown Middle and Late Iron Age (400 BC – AD 43) industrial site. Detailed excavations by Wessex Archaeology in spring 2013 revealed an organised, industrial complex involved in the smithing (forging objects from metal) of iron and the casting (creating metal objects from moulds) of copper alloy. These specialist and complex activities were taking place within a circular ditched enclosure, containing workshops and other structures of which little evidence survived.

Notable finds included numerous fragments of crucible (a vessel in which to melt metal) and a few small fragments of clay moulds, a rare discovery from archaeological excavations.

Iron smelting (extracting the metal from the ore) was probably not taking place on the Castleview Road site. This activity was probably taking place close to the iron-bearing Bagshot and Bracklesham Beds that lie across south and east Berkshire.

An unrelated surprise was the discovery of a near-complete Middle Neolithic (around 3,000 BC) spouted bowl from a shallow pit. No similar bowl has previously been found in Britain and so it appears to be unique.
Unlike Castleview Road, evidence for iron smelting was found at Folly Court, Wokingham, in 2014 during excavations by West Sussex Archaeology. The remains of three furnaces were found. Debris in the furnaces demonstrated that they were used primarily for smelting iron ore during the Middle and Late Iron Age period. All that survived of the furnaces was the clay-lined bowl of the furnace, the flue and fire pit. A clay superstructure would originally have risen above ground. The source of the iron ore used in the furnaces is not known but the Tertiary geological deposits in south-east Berkshire are known to contain iron-rich deposits.

A ditch demarcated the industrial working area but the houses and settlement of the Iron Age metalworkers were not found. They probably lie beyond the excavation area.

The Iron Age iron-smelting furnaces at Folly Court add to a number of similar discoveries in this part of Berkshire. It is hoped that future research will tell us more about the organisation of this important industrial activity in this period, such as the sources of ore and the relationship between smelting and smithing sites. Certainly these two discoveries in Slough and Wokingham demonstrate Berkshire’s important industrial past, not just since the Industrial Revolution, but since prehistory.
Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) is a way of looking at the landscape with archaeological eyes. When thinking of archaeology, perhaps the first things that spring to mind are artefacts or archaeological sites. However, HLC goes beyond that. It doesn’t just look at purely “archaeological” features, historic buildings or ornamental landscapes (such as parkland). Instead, it looks at the character of the landscape as a whole. Humans have interacted with the landscape for thousands of years. This has not stopped – we are still shaping and changing the landscape, and we are in turn affected by the landscape that we live in. HLC is a way to systematically “capture” the historic character of the present landscape.

In 2014, Adam Lodoen was employed by Berkshire Archaeology to create an HLC for east Berkshire. Adam has been involved in the archaeological sector in different capacities since the mid-1990s, when he completed his undergraduate degree. More recently, he has been working with Bournemouth University towards completing a PhD in Archaeology, involving analysing existing archaeological data for prediction and landscape characterisation.

The HLC project started more than 20 years ago in 1994, when Cornwall was the first county in England to create an HLC. East Berkshire is the last substantial area in England to be covered by Historic Landscape Characterisation - this will be the last piece of a very large jigsaw puzzle. Our project is funded largely by grant aid from Historic England.

The intention is that the HLC for east Berkshire will be used in many different ways, for instance for academic research, to inform planning decisions, and to make it possible to understand the landscape context of archaeological sites and monuments in the area.

The final product will be a large dataset and a report summarising the main findings. The dataset will comprise more than 5000 defined character areas. The project will be completed later this year.
On Sunday 18th September 1785, the new Congregational Chapel in West Street, Maidenhead, opened to a full house. The previous year, John Cooke was ordained as minister to the preceding meeting house, also located in West Street, but his success as a preacher led to the need for a new chapel that could seat 700 worshippers. Now the United Reformed Church, the former Congregational Chapel was modified on a number of occasions since its opening and, in the late 1970s, redevelopment adjacent to the Chapel led to the exhumation of graves within its graveyard, where burial had taken place from 1785 to 1908.

It was therefore a surprise when archaeological investigation in 2014 by Museum of London Archaeology - prior to further redevelopment adjacent to the Church - showed that a number of burials still remained in situ within the former graveyard.

The excavations recovered the remains of a minimum of sixty individuals, mostly buried in coffins in brick-lined vaults, although there were a few individuals buried in earth-cut graves. The names of a number of the interred are known from surviving, ornate coffin plates and correlate to the Church’s own burial records.

Preliminary assessment shows that both sexes are equally represented and there is a wide age range from child to aged adult. Where the date of death is known, most lie in the first half of the 19th century. Many of the individuals will therefore have lived through the tumultuous Napoleonic Wars and its aftermath against the background of the burgeoning industrial revolution and a growing demand for social justice and greater equality. It is hoped that further analysis of these remains will tell us more about the demography of this particular group of Late Georgian and Early Victorian residents of Maidenhead and the non-conformist congregation and tradition of which they were a part.
In the last 18 months Berkshire Archaeology has contributed to an important national project looking at how archaeological investigations, undertaken through the planning process, have increased our understanding of Roman Britain.

Cotswold Archaeology and the University of Reading are reviewing evidence for Roman settlements, farms and the countryside that have derived from commercial archaeological work in the last 20 years. The scale of this task is enormous! It is estimated that there have been over 9,000 separate investigations in England in that, in time, that have recorded Roman archaeology. Berkshire Archaeology’s contribution has been to provide information from the Historic Environment Record, along with reports and documents held within our records.

Many of the 9,000 investigations have been in east Berkshire. Unusually there are no known major or small Roman towns in our area, which lies between the regional capital of Calleva (Silchester) in Hampshire and the small town of Pontes (Staines) in Surrey at a crossing point of the River Thames. However many new Roman settlements, hamlets and farms have come to light in advance of new housing, mineral extraction and commercial development, such as at Thames Valley Park, Reading, Manor Farm, Binfield, and Jennetts Park, Bracknell to name just three. Most importantly, collectively these investigations provide evidence for the more mundane and everyday aspects of life, work and death in Roman Britain, and provide us with a fuller understanding of the complexity of Roman society away from the more specialised villas, temples and forts, which were more often the focus of antiquarian investigations.

The results of the project will provide valuable information and understanding of the Roman occupation and settlement of our region. This will improve our ability to predict and detect these sites, enable us to assess better their importance, develop better strategies for their investigation and enable us to demonstrate better the value of this work to those that pay for it. A cornerstone of the project is the dissemination of the results of the project.

Further information can be found through the Archaeology Data Service at; http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/romangl/
West End is an outlying settlement within the parish of Warfield, just north of Bracknell. The pretty hamlet lies in a large loop of The Cut, a small river, within a patchwork of fields, giving it a bucolic feel despite the proximity of suburban Bracknell. The local geology is London Clay, a stiff intractable geology, which has always been considered to have been undesirable for settlement or farming in antiquity.

This picture has been significantly altered over the last 25 years by archaeological investigations in advance of the northward expansion of Bracknell. This now includes investigations in 2014 and 2015 in advance of new housing and infrastructure to the west and east of West End. Thames Valley Archaeological Services are conducting excavations which are revealing Iron Age, Roman and medieval deposits.

Particularly interesting at West End, was the recognition of a number of late 11th to 14th century medieval enclosures. The enclosure ditches contained domestic pottery, showing that settlement was nearby and that the origins of the hamlet of West End certainly belong to the medieval period.

In April 2015 the ‘Solent-Thames Research Framework for the Historic Environment. Resource Assessment and Research Agendas’ was published by Oxford Wessex Archaeology and funded by Historic England. This represents a significant milestone for this important project, which was instigated in 2006 with the support and participation of Berkshire Archaeology. The volume firstly presents an assessment of the current state of archaeological knowledge in our region, including Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, and secondly sets out a series of research aims and priorities by period and theme. Many of the leading specialists in their fields have contributed to the project and make it an essential source of information for all those involved in archaeological research in all its forms in east Berkshire and beyond.

Such syntheses of our rich archaeological heritage are invaluable for understanding the gaps in our knowledge and how future research, from major projects to the smallest investigations, can be focused on advancing meaningfully our knowledge of the past. Several local eminent archaeologists have contributed to the published volume which is available from Oxford Archaeology, Wessex Archaeology and Oxbow Books.
An important member of the Berkshire Archaeology team is our Finds Liaison Officer, David Williams. David has continued to be busy identifying and recording archaeological finds from the five unitary authorities, particularly those reported by metal detectorists.

Recent discoveries include a complete Roman iron linch pin from south of Bracknell. The linch pin was used to secure the wheel of a cart to the axle. We will never know why this complete example was lost but its survival is notable as iron objects rarely survive in such good condition. The major Roman road, called the Devil’s Highway, runs close to an important roadside settlement at Wickham Bushes. This find may well have come from an occupant of this Roman village. A rare bronze knife was found south of Reading town centre and is almost complete, except for the very tip of the blade. Perhaps this is the reason why the knife was discarded. The knife dates to the Late Bronze Age, around 1,000 BC. Archaeological digs over the last 25 years in the Kennet Valley south of Reading have shown that this landscape was widely settled and farmed in this period. The knife adds to an increasingly full picture of life at this time in Reading. Rarer still is an Iron Age gold coin found south of Maidenhead. This beautiful object is a very rare find. We will never know why the coin was never recovered. It remained lost for over two thousand years before being found by a metal detectorist. The coin dates to the period 60-20 BC when Britain was divided into a series of tribal territories, in this case the tribe known as the Atrebates. The coin shows a stylised image of a horse with three tails(!) on one side and a stylised head on the other.

Artefacts reported to the Finds Liaison Officer also include non-metallic finds. Observant members of the public will frequently spot such finds when out walking the dog or digging their garden. One such item is a beautiful polished flint axe discovered near Wargrave in Wokingham. This fine object dates to the Neolithic period (4,200 BC – 2,200 BC) and is nearly complete. The axe is made from flint. It was initially bashed roughly into shape, and then skilfully ground and polished smooth. The uniform shape and smooth finish would have made the axe stronger than knapped stone axes. However some polished axes may have been valued for their beauty and symbolism. Many have been found buried in significant locations suggesting they were more than just functional objects.

Our Finds Liaison Officer is available to identify and record any objects found by chance and he can also provide helpful advice and guidance on the Treasure Act and other related matters. He regularly runs finds surgeries at Reading Museum and Wokingham Library and he can be contacted through Berkshire Archaeology or via email at david.williams@surreycc.gov.uk.
Reading Abbey is one of east Berkshire’s most significant historical and archaeological monuments. Founded in 1121 by King Henry I, the Abbey was one of northern Europe’s most prestigious religious and political centres, and one of the ten wealthiest monastic houses in England by the 14th century. It changed the shape of Reading, making it the most important town in the Thames Valley in the medieval period.

Unfortunately the impressive Abbey ruins are currently not in a suitable condition to allow public access. However many readers will be aware that Reading Borough Council has developed exciting plans to create a ‘Reading Abbey Quarter’ that will transform the Abbey precinct, including the Abbey ruins, into a unique historical and cultural destination. The Abbey Quarter plans will pull together the important historic sites, buildings and structures within this part of Reading under a single, co-ordinated approach.

It was therefore extremely good news when in December 2015 the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) confirmed that the Council’s ‘second round’ funding application for the Reading Abbey Revealed project had been successful, meaning that the Council can now finally fulfil its long-standing ambition to re-open the Abbey Ruins to the public. An exciting programme of events and educational activities is therefore planned that will breathe new life into this historic location and will sit alongside an extensive programme of conservation works to the Abbey Ruins and the Abbey Gateway.

Site-wide interpretation of the Abbey Quarter will include a new exhibition at Reading Museum. Part of the process has included extensive consultation with stakeholders, including Berkshire Archaeology, and the public. More than 1,000 Reading residents responded to an online survey conducted in 2015 on the Abbey Quarter project, demonstrating widespread public support for the project.

Conservation proposals for the Ruins and Gateway have been prepared following detailed condition surveys and trial repairs undertaken during the project’s development phase with specialists, architects and in close relationship with Historic England. Soon the residents of Reading and Berkshire, and those from farther afield, will have the opportunity to learn about the Abbey Quarter through extensive new interpretation information that will uncover its hidden heritage and reveal its pivotal significance to Reading’s history. It is anticipated that the Abbey ruins will be fully opened to the public by the summer of 2018.