

Dear All

As twice before, rather than give a Chair's Report at the AGM I'm writing to everybody early in the New Year both to look back at what the Society has done over the previous year and to look forward to this one.

First of all I must note the passing, in May, at the age of 90, of Professor John Hearle, member of GLAS but more importantly founder and Chair of our neighbour the Mellor Archaeological Trust (MAT). The obituary in the Guardian - <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/aug/11/john-hearle-obituary> - gives a good account not only of his academic career as a textile technologist but also of his contribution to archaeology for which he was awarded the MBE.

One of John's last achievements was to secure in 2013 the £1.5 million funding for MAT's "Revealing Oldknow's Legacy" project. As that was inevitably taking up most of MAT's time, and as there is a considerable overlap of membership, it was agreed in 2015 that GLAS would take lead responsibility for finishing outstanding work at Shaw Cairn. MAT is now even busier, having just announced that it has become the lead organisation in the UK in a Europe-wide initiative, with the appropriate acronym of STORM, "to reduce the impact of climate change, natural hazards and human actions on heritage", and so it has been agreed that GLAS will continue to lead on the cairn, which has been very productive so far and where new areas have been identified with the potential for several more seasons of excavation.

We were hopeful that the free availability, from September 2015, of Environment Agency Lidar data would enable us to search the "Bronze Age landscape" up on the tops more effectively for what we suspect may be many more sites than the three we already know for certain, but unfortunately the coverage – which is targeted at areas of flood risk – doesn't yet extend that high, and we may have to wait for the combination of Lidar and cheap drones, which doesn't seem very far off.

Elsewhere, however, the technology has already delivered startling results for us, with hopefully a great deal more to come. It gives amateur archaeologists with the necessary IT skills the ability to create topographical maps showing differences in altitude of as little as 5cm, which would have previously cost a fortune to produce using ground-based methods, if vegetation cover would have allowed them to be produced at all, and making it possible to search large areas, including woodland, for undiscovered sites. Having got to grips with the technology on the Society's behalf, in February Steve Whiteley created images which proved beyond reasonable doubt that Mouselow was what most people had always suspected it was, the site not just of a Norman ringwork castle but also of an Iron Age hillfort, and a draft report has gone to the County Archaeologist with a view to inclusion on the Heritage Environment Record (HER). It's not a small fort either – it could be as big as the other large forts in the county such as Fin Cop and Mam Tor.

The biggest impact nationally so far of free Lidar has been on the search for Roman roads, which are now popping up all over the place; and of course, we've got Roman roads. In fact, we may have one more than we thought we had; we are awaiting confirmation from a specialist that we have found the long-assumed, but never proved, road from Melandra through Longdendale into Yorkshire. In the meantime, though, Steve's Lidar images have clarified uncertainties about the precise line of the Melandra – Buxton road and a report for the HER is in preparation; and our colleagues in Tameside Archaeological Society are, just

over the border, using the same technology to assist them in their search for the also-assumed road to Castleshaw.

This technological empowerment of amateurs may have come at just the right time, as professional archaeology, other than that paid for by developers, continues to contract. In December John Barnatt retired from the Peak District National Park, leaving it without a field archaeologist for the first time in at least 30 years, and although the County Council Archaeology section and the HER has so far survived successive budget cuts, it took them nine months to upload the last batch of reports I sent, which is a strong disincentive to spend time drafting any more. With planning applications for housing now piling in (nine major developments awaiting approval in our area at the time of writing) archaeology is at risk if the HER is not accurate and up-to-date.

In the majority of cases, the commercial archaeologists find little of significance, but sometimes they strike gold. In July, our friends at Salford CfAA discovered a wheelpit under the demolished Wood's Mill – but not the one we thought they might find. We had thought it possible that John Wood, in the late 1840s, might have re-used the wheel from the earlier mill on the site, but what they found appears to show that he installed a completely new water-power system, 20 years after having introduced steam power to the area and at a time when the textbooks say water power was on its way out. Perhaps Mr Wood, who was a notorious counter of pennies, had realised two important things about Glossop; 1) there's a lot of rain and 2) it's free.....

One of the archaeologists recording the buildings before demolition, with extensive help from Mike Brown in his role as archivist to Glossop Heritage Trust, was Lynne Walker, who in June gave us a talk on "Glossop's Buildings At Risk" which was one of the best-attended of the year; Paul Beckmann posted on the Glossop's Heritage Facebook group that she had "a refreshingly 'neutral' viewpoint, assessing buildings on merit, not necessarily on familiarity to the public." Since then, considerable progress has been made in securing the future of two of the buildings, the Town Hall and the Victoria Hall, with a major Heritage Lottery bid now in preparation for the former and a group with the full backing of both local authorities planning to turn the latter into the Victoria Arts Centre. As part of those plans, the Heritage Trust is hoping to establish, within one or both buildings, display areas including secure cases to accredited-museum standards which would allow the repatriation on loan of artefacts currently held at Buxton Museum and elsewhere, together with the opportunity to display anything we might find in future.

The major finds from Mellor are on display at Stockport Museum just 5 miles from the site, but Glossop residents have to travel 15 miles to see the artefacts from the early Melandra digs which until 1939 were in the Victoria Hall, and this contributes to the problem that the fort is "out of sight, out of mind." There's plenty of evidence of a general interest locally in things Roman, but little awareness of the fort's potential as a community asset or pressure on local politicians to "do something", in contrast to vigorous campaigns to save the "Vic" in particular. In consequence, it has not been possible for the Council to nominate its quota of trustees to the proposed Melandra Trust, and we have therefore had to agree with them that this scheme will be put "on ice" for the time being whilst we do whatever we can to raise the profile of the site locally, regionally and nationally. As a first step, I've written to Historic England to ask that it be put back on the "Scheduled Monuments At Risk" list from which it was removed as progress appeared to be being made. In the meantime, the Council is

happy to support our Sisyphean efforts, led by Paul and Mike, to keep down the vegetation, and a call for volunteers will soon be going out.

Lack of progress on the Trust doesn't necessarily preclude at least a small dig at the site, and indeed some form of on-site activity would be very valuable as a way of increasing its visibility. Failing that, however, there's no shortage of other sites in our area which merit investigation. Leaving aside whatever else might be up on the Bronze Age Landscape, and a multitude of industrial sites most of which are best left to the professionals (but with us looking over their shoulders) we have dozens of unsurveyed buildings in the 12 old village centres; a deserted mediaeval village; a hillfort and Norman castle (bigger than Buckton) all in one; several new lengths of probable Roman road; a likely Iron Age/Romano-British settlement with another possible sighting reported to me this week; and the probable site of an important mediaeval manor house, maybe moated.

For at least some of these, finance, access and permissions are unlikely to be insuperable obstacles, but what we're short of is organising time, over and above what's needed to progress Shaw Cairn, which must merit priority in view of its proven importance. Last year, however, the committee agreed to adopt a sub-committee structure, which means in effect that any group of members which feels able to take on the responsibility for a project will, subject to committee approval and oversight, be free to do so.

Finally, I'm able to report that, subject to confirmations, we have a trio of high-quality external speakers booked for the March, April, and May meetings respectively, the intention being that we do reporting-back of our own activities in June and something outdoors in July (provided there's not a lot of rain). I hope to see you all there.

Best wishes

Roger

2/2/17