



Bolsterstone Archaeology and Heritage Group

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2023

ANNUAL REPORT

October 2022 – September 2023

The Group has had a great year since last October's AGM, going from strength to strength and back into a full routine. We've had a very varied programme of talks over the year, all available on zoom for those who didn't want to go out, and most have been recorded and made available on Youtube. We started out after the AGM hearing about the early gardens linked to the former Brodsworth Hall near Doncaster, which Colin Merrony has been researching for a long time (and he followed up with a visit there on 24 May). Our next event in early November was held in Bolsterstone Village Hall – an afternoon focussed on the Celts – and we had a great audience. Tim Cockrell set the local archaeological context and was followed by John Collis, a professor at the University of Sheffield, who shared his theories of how the myths around the Celts have developed over recent centuries. As always, tea and coffee were accompanied by delicious cakes.

Our November talk by Barry Tylee examined the outcomes of the Roughbircworth excavations. A large group got together for a delicious Christmas meal on 14 December at the King and Miller. We were back in January for a very different evening hearing about the Handsworth Sword dancers and a few even took the chance to experience some of the dance and create the 'lock' of swords. In February we experimented for the first time with a Members' Evening, inviting members to give a 10 minute talk about something of interest to them – it was really successful with five presentations: Jayne Wright and Catherine Cotterill on the *Bolsterstone Graveyard Project*, Jheri Bryant about *Bricks*, Steve Moxon on *Bolsterstone Mysteries: Aula, Castle & Stones*; Susie Abrahams on the *Menhirs of France (Carnac)* and Barbara Bristow about the *History of Greave House Farm*. We plan to do this again in the programme.

By March we were pleased to welcome Malcolm Nunn back for the second part of his Sheffield Flood of 1864 talk, and in April we again had a talk full of surprises, with items we could handle on the Neolithic salt-making activities found on the North Yorkshire coast – some of which had been featured on TV's 'Digging for Britain'. Yvette Marks gave us a great overview of the site and the finds.

Our own councillor Janet Ridler, also Heritage Champion for Sheffield City Council, joined us in May to talk about her work with Sheffield General Cemetery, which has recently had extensive renovations carried out. June saw Julie Banham tell us more about the families living at Wentworth Woodhouse, with a fascinating insight into parts of the



house never seen by the public, and we followed the talk by a visit to the house on 7 July. The last talk before the summer break was by Dave Pickersgill and John Stocks – a unique view beautifully presented of the role of alcohol in WW1.

The first talk of this winter's programme was by Bronwen Stone - some BAHG members have been volunteering with her, helping to measure and record the fragments of monastic glass she is researching at the University of Sheffield. She showed us some amazing short films of making glass and stained-glass panels.

We owe a huge debt of gratitude to everyone who helps to run our talks programme – from opening the building, making tea, running the raffle and setting out chairs, and Andy Heath, who manages such a complex system of IT equipment to enable members to join in on zoom from home and listen to a recording afterwards. Very few groups offer this flexibility. We appreciate too the opportunity to meet in the Christ Church hall which is so warm and comfortable.

Committee

The committee was pleased to welcome Andrew Drabble and Catherine Cotterill at last year's AGM. The 9 members have met as usual every two months in the Stocksbridge Town Hall Council Chamber, and have been very busy discussing the talks programme, the fieldwork surveys and excursions, ways to share details of local heritage, where to apply for grants and so on. We recently discussed in the committee how to cover increasing costs of room hire and expenses, and we agreed, rather than increase the BAHG annual subscription, to increase the charge for each meeting to £2 for members and £4 to non-members from November 2023.

Cllr Janet Ridler, Heritage Champion for Sheffield City Council, joined us at our March committee, and we had a really useful discussion – we were able to share some of our experiences and projects and hear more about Janet's role.

We had hoped to get more involved with schools but now realise the pressure on the curriculum makes this too difficult, and we plan to involve children and families in archaeology in other ways, such as the Graveyard Project event we are planning in November.

Our membership has stayed stable at 65 members. However talks attract a wider audience and we notice the numbers of non-members vary depending on the topic. We welcome feedback – completed forms include a suggestion to offer a series of talks building on a particular area, comments on 'really friendly people' and an 'excellent venue'. Please keep on filling them in.

We are still using the Sheffield Town Trust grant to support some of Tim Cockrell's fieldwork and have just been successful in achieving another grant from the Bridge Community Shop towards the Broomhead Moor survey.

Dorothy Whittaker looks after our BAHG Facebook page and we now have well over 700 followers. We've had so much interest about the Bolsterstone Churchyard Project too. We now have people following us in Canada, USA, Australia and New Zealand, as well as in various places in the UK. A great achievement.

As Secretary Ruth Morgan is standing down at the AGM, the committee has been discussing how to cover the role. It has been divided into three areas

- managing the committee
- membership and keeping in touch
- planning the programme

which three committee members will share amongst them. Tim Cockrell is going to take on the new role of Programme Secretary to set up the monthly talks. Catherine Cotterill will in the short-term look after the committee, Jayne Wright will help with membership and Dorothy Whittaker will be Communications Secretary - keeping in touch with the membership. We still need a secretary longer-term and a membership secretary, so do think about how you can help.

Visits

In June we visited the excavation at **Sheldon** in Derbyshire of a circular henge which had only recently been discovered on LIDAR, but was really quite obvious on the ground among lead-working disturbance. It was a terrible wet day in the midst of sunshine, but Colin Merrony and his team worked on cheerfully exposing a wide rock-cut ditch and bank in one trench and in another trench the entrance of a henge about 70m in diameter. On a clear day the view from the site would be amazing.



(right) of the Sheldon henge.

The ditch and bank (left) and the entrance



In July members joined a tour of **Wentworth Woodhouse** with Julie Banham, who gave us a talk *Three Families, Three Houses - the Story of Wentworth Woodhouse* earlier this year. She started off with an outline of the house's history in the Chapel, and then led us outside to point out details of the facade of the Palladian east front of the house, followed by explanations of some of the symbolism on the brick-built west front. Inside, we climbed the grand staircase to view the amazing ballroom and some of the state rooms.

In the same month we were able to visit the excavation site at **Castleton New Hall** directed by Colin Merrony of the Department of Archaeology at the University of Sheffield and supported by the Castleton Historical Society. Colin explained that this year's excavation had revealed the east end of the southern range of New Hall. The north wall of the northern range, elusive in previous excavations, was exposed.



A Nuremburg counter token dated to 1580 CE to 1620 CE had been found in the excavations which had provided useful dating evidence.

Strines Edge Walk

We seemed to pick the coldest day of the year for this walk (it was January!) Grey skies and icy winds prevailed as our little group walked along the edge amongst snow looking for evidence of boundary stones, stone getting, stone working and anything archaeological that poked out above the heather. With Ruth's knowledge we spotted many marked boundary stones indicating that this route has importance in the ownership of the moorland over the years. The track also marks the South Yorkshire-Derbyshire boundary which accounts for some of the stones.

We also began to recognise signs of where stone had been removed from to make boundary stones and gateposts, and found lots of stone which had been worked, but left abandoned. The best find was a large and partly worked piece of stone which appeared to have been on its way to becoming a trough. Unfortunately, it looked to have quite a large crack in it, rendering it unsuitable and therefore left to the elements.

The work on recording boundary and marker stones is being greatly helped by Christopher Goddard's book *'The South Yorkshire Moors'* (Gritstone, Hebden Bridge) – well worth buying.

Midhope Walk

On 16 August a group of us met at the Old Mustard Pot for our walk around Midhope. We started the walk by Toll Bar Cottage on the A616 and made our way back into the village past the Pot house site, up to the old Forge before following the footpath behind the old School House to St James' Well, taking in the site of the old Midhope Hall, which unfortunately is not accessible to the public. We continued our walk to the 14th century St James' Church, restored by Lord of the Manor Godfrey Bosville in 1705. On our way back to the village we passed the site of the old school and finished back at the Old Mustard Pot for refreshments. It was an enjoyable walk with lots of discussion about the village along the way.

Fieldwork in Ecclesall Woods

Over the course of the autumn and winter, a walkover survey to search for prehistoric rock-art took place in Ecclesall Woods, carrying on from where we left off at the end of the previous winter season. The conditions were challenging in the dense undergrowth, but the weather was fine and a number of simple cup-marked panels were recorded. Late

in the season the team supplemented the rock-art survey with recording of other features in a small area of the woods along Limb Brook that had never been investigated before, after meeting with Ian Rotherham who had first spotted the features. They included prehistoric cairns, as well as installations probably connected with basket making in the post-medieval period and the foundations of a small building.



The survey of Ecclesall Woods is now almost complete. Probably only one more day's fieldwork will be needed in the coming year before the survey will be written up.



Redmires Prisoner of War Camp

As part of the Sheffield Lakeland Landscapes Project, CFA Archaeology were tasked with having a closer look at the site of the well-known prisoner of war camp at Redmires. Having been investigated before, it was thought that all that remained after the camp was demolished were the large concrete hut bases.



However, a couple of weeks in and further details had emerged from under the brambles and fallen trees. Finds included part of a soldier's identification tag, parts of a leather boot and a spoon! A maze of interconnected, brick paths were exposed which demonstrated that prisoners had developed the access between huts and also made small gardens surrounding the entrances. Evidence of drainage was found and paths leading off to the shower block.

Photos – Steve Hollings

Local and not so local residents came to share their social histories of family members who had either worked at the camp or been housed there. It is well known that some prisoners stayed in Sheffield after the war.

Mills of the Upper Don



Another Sheffield Lakeland Landscape Project in the spring was a survey to search for and record the water-powered mills of the Upper Don. The study was organised by CFA Archaeology. Many such mills have existed along the length of the Upper Don river, but information was scant between Oxspring and Oughtibridge. This project hoped to fill the gap using archival resources and surviving features.

An initial reconnaissance site investigation determined thirteen suitable sites within seven areas were appropriate to conduct a Level 1 Historic Building Recording Survey. Unfortunately, we were victims of the March snow, but managed to get to all the sites eventually.

The project involved training at Sheffield Archives which was really useful, and experience of conducting Level 1 surveys in the field. Many skills were practiced including using maps effectively to record change, creating survey drawings, using the National Grid References system, taking appropriate photographs using a DSLR camera and learning buildings and technical vocabulary.

We hope to carry on this work by surveying further mill sites (we have already done two more) and getting the details published.

The Archaeology of a Graveyard – St Mary’s Bolsterstone



Photo - Jayne Wright



Drone footage – Ben Hopkins

On a fresh October day, we gathered in the Village Hall to launch our Graveyard Project. Jayne and Dorothy led the introduction using materials devised by Harold Mytum from The University of Liverpool. He is a Professor of Archaeology with a particular interest in working with communities on the recording, management and interpretation of graveyards. Armed with recording sheets, tape measures, toothbrushes and water bottles the volunteers have begun to record details of all remaining memorials in the graveyard around the church. The data, added to that collected by the Moxon family some years ago, will complete a record which links the church burial records to individual plots. Many headstones have disappeared, fallen over or been irreparably damaged so it is vital that this work is completed whilst the evidence is still there.

The volunteers have continued to collect the data despite winter weather and difficult conditions underfoot and are now fully back in action. Quite often we have been fuelled with soup, tea and cake by the wonderful volunteers in the church and our grateful thanks go to them. We are still on the look out for any stories you may have about people buried in the graveyard, so please send them through.

You will already know about our event on November 4th - ‘The Archaeology of a Graveyard – St Mary’s Bolsterstone’. In the afternoon, we will share the information we have collected so far, look at the geology of the headstones, learn about the work of The Commonwealth War Graves Commission and hear some of the interesting stories behind the people buried there. We have also planned a Young Archaeologists activity for children in the morning, so we hope to see lots of you there.

South Yorkshire Local Heritage List

The Annual Report last year noted some of the local heritage sites which had already been approved by an assessment panel to be on the List. Since then we’ve put forward Walder’s Low and the settlement site on Wharnccliffe Chase known as Whitley Church, and are doing the research for the battlemented water reservoir on Hunshelf Bank, the turnstile on the footpath down from Bolsterstone and the fine pair of gateposts on Heads Lane. We’d like to hear about any other ‘assets’ you think are important.



Public Art Recording

Similarly there is a project taking place to record public art and our area is poorly represented. The fox statue and mural at Fox Valley and some of the Glen Howe carvings are the only ones on the map so far. The Wantley Dragon has been put forward, but we need more nominations – or do we just need more sculptures and artwork in our area?

The project has been featured in The Star - read [the article](#) [Sheffield Public Artworks Map: 15 photos of the most weird and wonderful public art on city's streets](#) | [The Star](#)

Wantley Dragon



If you have walked recently to Bitholmes Wood and passed the stone dragon sculpture with the intricately carved wooden head, you will have noticed that the wood is now rotten and has fallen into pieces. Dan Cunningham – local historian and YouTuber has been championing the restoration of The Wantley Dragon. It's a place that is special to him and he really wanted to see it back to its previous state. After trying and failing to contact the responsible bodies, he finally enlisted the help of our local MP who gathered the right people together to devise a plan. Successful funding bids have been completed and Steel Valley Project and Stoneface Creative commissioned to complete the restoration. We await details of an unveiling event – well done Dan!

Heritage Open Days

Our councillor Janet Ridler is one of the organisers of Heritage Open Days in September. This year we were unable to organise a walk around Stocksbridge or Bolsterstone for various reasons but the Valley Museum in the Town Hall was on the programme, and Mike Dyson led a walk to see the musket targets on Wharncliffe Chase.



Sheffield Heritage Fair

It was great to be part of this annual and ever-growing event in The Millenium Gallery back in January. We squeezed onto the Hunter Archaeological Society's table and gave out copies of our programme for this year. A big plus was the opportunity to chat to lots of people, all interested in history and heritage. It's a fabulous event with so many societies and groups showcasing their work across the city. We would recommend a visit if you get the chance next year and hopefully BAHG can be a bigger presence with displays of our projects too.

Bolsterstone Fair

On a very blustery and cool afternoon, we took our place on the field as part of the annual Bolsterstone Fair. This long established and much loved summer event appeared to be back to its former post Covid glory. There were lots of people, particularly families in attendance all enjoying the traditional sideshows. We wanted to have lots of photos, reports and other evidence of our activities out for people to see, but...the wind got the better of us and only our pot of 'finds' remained safely on the table. However, it was great to chat to folk about our group and hear their stories about archaeological projects they'd been involved in. Clearly there are lots of people out there with interest and knowledge in heritage. Hopefully we managed to persuade some of them to join us for our talks and maybe even become members.

So thank you very much for being members and supporting the Group and all its activities. We think you can see how busy we have been over the past year, with so many projects under way. By joining BAHG, you are able to hear more about some of these and other topics and visit interesting places, but you also get to hear regularly about events by email and can borrow a range of books and magazines we have available for loan at meetings. We are an affiliate organisation with the CBA (Council for British Archaeology) and receive an excellent Archaeology magazine every two months which is available for members to read – copies are available at meetings.

Do let us know of interesting places we could visit or of topics you would like to hear more about. A feedback form is available at meetings and we'd really like to hear your thoughts. We have a full programme of talks planned for the coming year but we always welcome new ideas - do share them with us.

Ruth and Catherine, Sept 2023