

West Essex Archaeological Group - Fifty-Seventh AGM: 14th March 2016

Chairman's Report 2015 - 2016

Throughout 2015, our society has continued to do well. We have a very vibrant series of lectures and continue to provide field activities for members, as well as members of the public as part of Copped Hall Trust's education programme. But many of us helping to carry the society forward feel that we could be doing better.

We have lost members over the last few years. There are many reasons why this is the case – members pass away, they move away, they forget to renew and they do not want to renew. We are not alone in showing declining membership figures – it is a national phenomenon for special interest groups such as ours. It is possible to get a rich diet of archaeology from cable TV and the internet and the success of some magazines, such as Current Archaeology and British Archaeology help to satisfy many people's desires to learn a bit more about archaeology and to keep up to date with new discoveries.

In 2015, WEAG's main committee examined in great detail the tasks that even a small society such as ours needs to cover in order to function for its members and to attract new members. As we move into 2016, we hope that this evaluation process will lead to more activities for our existing members – and also help to attract new members.

One key feature of all our activities, which has helped to maintain and add new members, has been our fieldwork at Copped Hall. We have completed work on the dovecote trench and that has now been backfilled, but work must now begin on the post-excavation analysis of what we found. New initiatives will be designed around this, which, I hope, may be of interest to those who wish to engage in field archaeology but are not too keen or able to get into the trench.

Also, we are recommencing our publication programme – and the post-excavation work at Copped Hall will add to this – but we begin with a volume on the history of ownership of Copped Hall. Norah Carlin's text is currently with me, as editor, and we hope to be able to publish this during 2016. The Viola Parr Bequest will fund its publication, and the volume will be dedicated to her memory as a lasting legacy.

I would finally like to thank WEAG's vice-Chairman, Andrew Madeley, for having to step in for me so many times – as at the AGM in March.

John Shepherd FSA MCIfA