

West Essex Archaeological Group - Fifty-Eighth AGM: 13th March 2017

Vice-Chairman's Report 2016 - 2017

Throughout 2016, our society has continued to do well, with an entertaining and informative series of lectures, and ongoing field activities for our members, and the public, as part of the Copped Hall Trust Archaeological Project, supporting the Trust's education programme. However the feeling of the Committee and Sub-Committees, supported by feedback from members, is that we could be doing better.

The loss of members that we have experienced over the last few years is continuing, though we are not alone in showing declining membership figures – it is affecting many special interest groups such as ours across the country. Reasons for this include – members passing on, they move away, they forget to renew or they do not want to renew. With the growth in the availability of information about archaeology and history on the many TV channels and the internet, many people feel that they can satisfy their wish to learn about archaeology and to keep up to date with new discoveries without the need to belong to a specific society.

To try to counter this we need to understand better what it is that people want from a society like WEAG, and also what they are prepared to put into it. To this end we have been working on a two-pronged approach. Firstly we have been surveying a broad sample of local societies (not just archaeology / history based) to see what they offer to their members for the fees that they charge e.g. lectures, practical activities, visits, publications, etc. – the results of this will feed into potential changes to WEAG. Secondly we have been preparing a questionnaire that will shortly enable you to tell us what you like and dislike about WEAG, what you want from it and are prepared to contribute to it, and how you would like it to change and improve. Please can you help us by filling in and returning it with your comments (both good and bad) to help us improve WEAG – it is your society and without your input we cannot move it forward.

One of our key activities, of course, is the continuing fieldwork at Copped Hall. A huge amount has been done there on all of the trenches, but we must press forward with the post-excavation analysis of what we have found, leading to the next set of reports. This work will generate opportunities of interest to those who wish to engage in field archaeology but are not too keen or able to get into the trench.

Along with this we have been looking for opportunities to carry out fieldwork at other sites, and this year members have carried out surveys at Long Shaw (Roman and air-crash site near Theydon Bois) and have started digging in Valentines Park. Further work is planned at both of these sites, and other opportunities elsewhere are being investigated.

Work on the book detailing the history of ownership of Copped Hall, written by Norah Carlin, is progressing, and we hope to be able to publish it in the near future. 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 all the members of the WEAG Committee and Sub-Committees for contributing so much of their time and enthusiasm to the running of the group. However we are short of a number of officers – our Chairman, John Shepherd, stood down in July, our Treasurer Colin Mann is standing down and we have been short of a Secretary for over 2 years: if any member would like to put themselves forward to join the Committee and fill one of these roles we would be very pleased to consider them.

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