

West Essex Archaeological Group - Fifty-Ninth AGM: 12th March 2018

Vice-Chairman's Report 2017 - 2018

2017 has been another good year for the society, with a continuing series of informative and entertaining lectures (including reporting by members on their own visits and works), together with further field work by our members, and the public, as part of the Copped Hall Trust Archaeological Project, supporting the Trust's education programme.

This does not mean that there is no room for improvement, and the Committee and Sub-Committees are continuing to seek input and feedback from members to make sure that we identify and improve anything that we could be doing better.

The loss of members continues, though this is a problem that affects many special interest groups of all disciplines across the country. As we have identified before, the reasons for this are wide-ranging, including competition for spare time from other leisure activities and changes in the way that people participate.

To help us understand better what it is that people want from, and offer to, a society like WEAG, a questionnaire regarding what you like and dislike about WEAG and how you would like it to change and improve it was circulated – thank you to all of the members who took the time to complete and return it. The responses are currently being analysed, and we hope to have the results shortly. These will be combined with our survey of a sample of local societies (not just archaeology / history based) looking at their offer to members, to identify any potential changes to WEAG.

One of our key activities, of course, is the continuing fieldwork and engagement with the public at Copped Hall. The trenches there have all made major progress, but much remains to be done towards the ongoing post-excavation analysis of both the finds and records, leading to the next set of reports. We continued to carry out fieldwork at other sites this year, including Valentines Park, though not as much as we would like. We will continue to investigate and follow up other such opportunities as they become available.

Unfortunately 2017 has included the loss of two stalwarts of the local archaeological field – Peter Huggins and Frank Clark. Peter, who died at the age of 90 in November, was a leading expert on the history of Waltham Abbey, and was for many years the major driving force behind the historical society there, having joined it in the 1960's. Frank died in July, aged 96, following a long career in engineering and archaeology. Frank joined the fledgling WEAG around 1960 and quickly became a major contributor to its activities, with possibly his greatest legacy being the work he did between 1972 and 1981 at Little London near Abridge, though this was just part of the broad spread of the work he did with WEAG. Both will be sadly missed by their friends and colleagues.

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. I would particularly like to thank Hazel McClory who is standing down after many years of sterling service as our Membership Secretary – this has been a challenging role that has occupied, at times, a significant part of Hazel's time and I would like to express the gratitude of the Committee for all of the work she has put into it. You may remember that we have been without a Chairman for some time since John Shepherd stood down in July 2016, and we are fortunate that Tony O'Connor from the Epping Forest District Museum has agreed to being sponsored for that role. I want to thank Colin Mann for work as our Treasurer – he is standing down and we are lucky that Victoria Hoskins is willing to take on that position. This still leaves the position of Secretary to be resolved, and the processes for handling memberships, but the Committee will be following up on proposals that have been made regarding them, after the A.G.M.

I would like to wish all members the very best for the coming year.

Andrew Madeley BSc