

BEXLEY ARCHAEOLOGICAL GROUP



Newsletter

August 2026

Next issue December

Deadline for articles 19/11/26



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BAG Committee

President – David Lawrence
Chairman – Clare Lodge
Deputy Chairman, Training Officer – Steve Taylor
Principle Field Officer, Public Relations Officer & Talks Organiser – Clare Lodge
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Newsletter Editor – Andi McLaughlin
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Jill Crumpton
Paula Gordon

Management Committee Members:

Ali Burnal, Andrea McLaughlin, Cathy Nicholson, Clare Lodge, Federica Spagnoletti, Jayne Harper, Marian Andrews, Martin Baker, Paul Edwards, Pauline Whittle, Steve Taylor, Paula Gordon, Jill Crumpton

If you would like to be on the BAG Committee, please do step forward. We are always looking for help. Please email pr@bag.org.uk

See fees and link below:

Membership Fees:

Individual Membership - £20
Household Membership - £30
Friends of BAG – Lifetime Membership - £150

You can fill in the membership form online with this link:

<https://www.bag.org.uk/join-us/>

Members:

Are all welcome to:

- come and dig on site and are covered by our insurance.
- Attend our bi-monthly talks.
- Pay a discounted rate for our workshops.
- Receive regular newsletters by email.

Welcome to the August newsletter which aims to deliver something for everyone. A huge thank you to those members who contributed articles, I really struggle to complete the newsletter without you!

We have had some interesting talks – our thanks to Clare who always come up trumps, sourcing great speakers throughout the year!

The site has new steps which are nearing completion and we hope this will encourage more members to come down and get involved. We need plenty of help with excavating and finds processing etc; there is always lots of interesting and useful work to do



Dates for your Diary

Further to the closure of the Conservative Club, our talks are now to be held at :

Hurst Community Centre, Hurst Road, Sidcup, DA5 3LH. Closest buses (right outside are the 229, 269 and 492). Plenty of parking. We will be in Room 15, on the First Floor. Hopefully next year, we can get be on the ground floor.

Dates for talks in 2026 will be:

17 Sept - Jessica Bryan, Project Officer MOLA “MOLA excavations at 50 Fenchurch Street: An overview of the archaeological work to date”

19 Nov – Wayne Perkins will talk about “3 Castles in Kent: Fortified Against Maleficium”. He will cover Tonbridge, Deal and Upnor.

Events:

Throughout 2026 - Community Archaeology volunteering in Kent – Archaeology in Shorne Woods Country Park. This project, on a mid-18th to mid-19th century structure and tile kiln will run throughout this year. Website: shornewoodsarchaeology.co.uk for more information

Friday, 11 September 19:00-20:30 Maidstone Museum - Tour of Lives in our Landscape Gallery. Join KAS Curator for a guided tour

- **Saturday 12 September 14:00-17:00 Scadbury Moated Manor, Chislehurst**
open weekend ODAS will be opening its excavations

World of Stonehenge Online

<https://research.reading.ac.uk/british-museum-partnership/the-world-of-stonehenge-virtual-exhibition/>

<https://www.cloudtour.tv/the-world-of-stonehenge/>

You may also be interested in looking on

www.lamas.org.uk

www.kentarchaeology.org.uk



Lesnes Abbey – Excavation

Sunday 26 April 2026

By Clare Lodge

The project was entitled “Searching for surviving traces of Lesnes Abbey on the 500th anniversary of its dissolution” led by Dig Ventures.



I arrived nice and early and once again, like the day before, I had the privilege of being able to park in the grounds.

Today, though I went incognito. I was just going to be Clare. No BAG reference anywhere. I wanted to be able just to dig – no responsibilities as such...

Several of us had already met some of the Dig Ventures team the day before and during the week and on the Saturday when we were stalling out.

As I had got there nice and early, I aided them with taking some equipment down. I met Darcy and Lauren and were chatting to them. Darcy said “oh you’re with BAG” – she recognised me. As I was talking to Lauren though – and she said she was from Bexleyheath – “I said I know you”. Turned out she had been on one of our training courses years ago, and I had sold her my copy of the “Archaeology: Theories, Methods and Practice” by Colin Renfrew and Paul G Bahn. We were also `friends` on social media! She has been a professional archaeologist now for over 10 years and once worked at MOLA before moving to Iceni Projects.

After we signed the risk assessment, we had to introduce ourselves. I said, “My name is Clare, and I am with Bexley Archaeological Group”. That was it.

Our aim of the excavation today was to try and level out the very large trench. Part of Victorian culvert had already been revealed in the southern end, and there was also the discussion of perhaps a wall made of flint appearing in the north part of the trench.

The ground was so uneven. A week of volunteers including school children, had created small `craters`, so looked like a mini Grimes Graves. However, us 6 volunteers lined up. Armed with

our trowels, buckets, coal shovels, and kneelers, and working north – south we tried our best to level the ground.

We were also joined in the trench by two new members of BAG, Ray and Christine, who had participated at the excavation throughout the week. And who, Christine had said the day before “that I have been at your house!” which completely threw me! Apparently, several years ago, I did a call out on the local social media in Barnehurst, requesting for any old Chinese take away plastic boxes, and she had kindly dropped some down to me! Small world!

The ground was extremely dusty, and weather hot (in mid 20s). As time went on, we quickly cleared the soil and made the ground level. Different finds were coming up, CBM, glass, pottery, loads of nails. I found a coin, I think George V, but wasn’t too sure as it was damaged, and a shark’s tooth. Sadly, they went into the finds tray, and I never saw them again

Overall, I had fun excavating and had a nose full of dust – which for several days this was noticeable every time I sneezed! Afterwards I headed home and bought dinner for my husband and I in a takeaway – the owner asked me if I was ok... I didn’t realise the state of my face. I think he thought I was homeless!

There is lots to be read about the excavation online – including You Tube videos which feature some of our members (note the green BAG T-Shirts!)

<https://digventures.com/projects/lesnes-abbey/timeline/>



The “Trench”



The “Culvert” with Lauren



The "Culvert" but how far does it go..



Christine a new member of BAG doing a grand job of cutting back those roots which always seem to materialise!



A burnt and dirty face Clare!



Darcy and the ranging rods, getting ready for surveying



The wildlife at the end enjoying their `supper`!

‘Best of Friends’ – Footscray Meadows event – Paula Gordon

The Friends of Footscray Meadows (FFCM) celebrated their 20th anniversary on Saturday June 27th, 2026, by holding a free family fun day near the Five Arches Bridge.

That day was the height of one of the many heatwaves we have had this year- it was baking hot from early in the morning and just got hotter as the day went on. I parked my car in the main car park and had a serene walk through the meadows with my dog Blueberry - thinking as I always do that the meadows is one of my favourite places on the planet and I can't believe I live only a short distance away. As I walked towards Five Arches, the heat was so intense that Blueberry and I walked a fair distance through the river leading up to the bridge. Again, I was overwhelmed by the beauty of the moment - the trickling sound of the crystal-clear chalk stream, groups of tiny fish and even fish 30cm in length (tench?) swimming freely around my feet. Damsel, dragon and butterflies silently fluttering around us as we strode downstream in the perfectly cool water. Heaven.

The event kicked off to a large, gathered crowd at 11.30am with a speech by co- chair Michael Heath detailing the forming of the group back in 2006 and key milestones achieved over the last two decades.

The event was well publicised via posters and social media and well attended taking into account the heat.

Many dogs were there too and there were plenty of treats and water on offer to make sure they were ok. All food was free to the public with a good spread of quality options such as hot spring rolls, samosas and some very yummy cupcakes complete with an edible Five Arches bridge decoration. This was such a well thought out touch and highlights the care and attention to detail the committee members have when planning public events. All catering and the event itself was paid for by FFCM members subscription and donations. The new Mayor of Bexley Cllr Lisa Jane Moore and consort her husband Justin Moore officially opened the event with a speech - one of her first in her mayoral role. There were various stalls including a traditional wood working stall, Greenwich Wildlife Trust, ice cream and local Bexley honey by a lady with bee hives in her Bexley village garden! I bought some and we got talking and I asked how to stop it crystalising.

She explained what I thought - just heat gently in warm water. It was great talking to someone local who produces something so amazing just up the road. Then she told me a honey story I will never forget and that took me aback. She asked if I had ever noticed that cheaper supermarket honey never crystalises. I said thinking about it I didn't think it did - why is this? She explained it is because it is 'imported' from the EU who mainly imports it from China and the reason it doesn't crystallise is because the bees are kept in giant aircraft hangers and fed sugar syrup - never flying freely or landing on flowers in the warmth of the sun. This is such a sad story of how things have evolved - I think I will stick with Bexley honey in future.....

At the centre of the event were several well put together FFCM information boards with lots of informative photos and words about local ecology, trees and wildlife in the meadows, the history of the area, including of course, information on the great Footscray Place, the geology of the land and info on the Friends themselves. One of the most surprising facts I read was that in 1949 some youths broke into All Saints Church, stole the local record book dating back to the 16th century and mindlessly threw it into the river. It was found but the water damage meant it was irreparable. I had to double check the date of this - was it 1949 or more present day??? No

i had read the date correctly - I mistakenly believed mindless idiocy like this was a more recent thing to happen but no - there were bored idiots around even in the 1940's.

As always at a FFCM event, it was organised and managed by the committee members and volunteers to the highest standard. The free professional catering was especially good quality and well received by the public. Fingers crossed they had a good member take up on the day - at £5 a year it is such a small price to pay to help preserve this very special local open space.



Thank you to our members who turned out for the AGM on 21st May, I'm sure you will have enjoyed the talk afterwards given by Germander Speedwell as well as the opportunity to look at some of her collection. For those who were unable to attend.....

Germander gave an interesting talk on clay pipes and brought along a lovely selection from her own collection.



Clay pipes in the 1800s often featured something political or newsworthy for example the Great Exhibition (1851), Prince Regent's Bomb, Omer Pasha (also known as Omer Pasha Latas) who served as a strategic commander for the Ottoman Army during the Crimea War (1853), the opening of Tower Bridge (1894). Some pipes show masonic design and RAOB (order of Buffalos),

others depicting sports and leisure (football, cricket, billiards) or plants and animals (acorns, rose & thistle). Some French pipes had painted detail examples of which are shown below.

Some pipe 'erotica' were also made! Not featured here of course



Down House – (no photos as they are not permitted in the house)

My granddaughter loves nature, and for her birthday I thought it would be appropriate to take her to Down House. Surprise, surprise, she already knew so much about Charles Darwin that she was explaining to me before we had even entered! 'He is my hero' she told me and added 'apart from David Attenborough first and Steve Backshall'!

This article is more about the house itself.

This was Charles and Emma's first house. They found their rented property in London so cramped as they had two children at the time and Emma was again pregnant with their third child. They borrowed money to purchase Down House.

Charles Darwin lived at Down House for 40 years with his wife and children (ten children in all, but three sadly died). He developed his theory of natural selection and wrote his work 'On the Origin of the Species' here (1859).

The house was built in the 18th century, possibly on the site of a 17th century house. In the late 18th century, it was modernised after George Butler a rich businessman bought it in 1778. He built a new kitchen and service block onto the South end and improved the rooms on the ground floor, moving the entrance to the North side and the staircase to its present position.

The house changed hands several times after Butler's death in 1783. A property speculator, Nathaniel Godbold acquired it in 1818 and rented it out to John Johnson, colonel of engineers in the Honourable East India Company who later bought it.

In 1837 the Vicar of Downe, Revd J Drummond bought the house. He commissioned Architect and Civil Engineer Edward Cressy who lived locally to make some improvements which included a new roof, two bathrooms, a stable yard and a cottage.

Charles and Emma Darwin moved into the house in September 1842. AT the time they had two children and Emma was pregnant. They viewed the property as ugly, and the following spring Charles again commissioned Cresy to make further changes. The main change was the addition of a full-height bay window with views across the garden which involved raising the ceiling and the height of the rooms above it.

In 1857 the Darwin's felt the dining room insufficient to accommodate then and their extended family, so they commissioned a new one with a large bedroom over it. It was completed in 1858.

Apart from some minor alterations, no further changes were made to the house until 1876 when the Architect William Cecil Marshall was engaged to build an extension on the North side. It was originally intended as billiard room and probably prompted by the arrival of his son Frank who came to live with his baby at Down after the death of his wife.

It is a lovely building, and I particularly loved the main bedroom overlooking the garden and with the natural light flooding in. Charles and Emma's children must have enjoyed such a lovely time in the house and grounds and with such liberal parents! The children had their own 'stair-slide'.....my granddaughter particularly liked that idea!!



Craig Campbell (Society Archivist and Librarian) & Andy Ward (Curator), Kent Archaeological Society came on 16th July to give us a talk about their current activities, outstanding collections and future aims of the Society.

We applaud their exhaustive work with such a large archive and library which were proudly displayed in their photographic presentation. They brought along some incredibly detailed drawings and manuscripts which were an absolute pleasure and privilege to look at.

The KAS was founded in 1857 to promote, protect and provide access to the history and archaeology of the ancient county of Kent. A membership society dedicated to researching and preserving the heritage of Kent, it is the custodian of several important national archaeological collections. The ancient county included within its scope parts of Bexley, Bromley, Lewisham and Greenwich.

The KAS has been directly involved in conducting fieldwork in Kent since 1860.

The current society is a charitable organisation engaged in education, collections management, public outreach, excavation and the promotion of Kent heritage.

Apologies that this edition of the newsletter was not released in time for the event held at Maidstone Museum for the Festival of Archaeology. Check out the website for events museum/Maidstone.gov.org for future events and information.



Site Report for LFL 19

Progress in Trenches 3, 8 and 9. These are uncovering quite a lot of finds. Recording is also underway. Desperately need people though to help Pauline with finds processing. Even if just pot washing, or collating.



Trench 10

Whilst the new steps were being dug out, Clare decided that a `stone` that was appearing needed to come out as was becoming a health and safety risk, and people could trip over it.



To put into context. Here is a photo of the new steps being constructed, and the `stone` in question.

But no... it wasn't a stone.. it was a brick.. that was connected to another brick, and another and another, and a concrete floor started to appear! This is typical! There should not be any building located here. Not on any maps!

Therefore we have had to give it a `trench` number. Get a finds tray, trench box sorted. You can imagine.. this is a spot that we have all walked over hundreds of times since 2019! This was the case of “ in all the places on the site, why does it have to be there!”.

And digging began. Luckily, it is only 5cm down. Top soil coming out very easy and a wealth of finds emerging, it is tray after tray. Poor Pauline!



Scale: 1:10cm



On Saturday 22 August, we found the return of the wall. Therefore continuation southwards now. Hopefully there is more wall and flooring.

Come down to site to see for yourselves! Photographs do not do it justice.

As always, thank you to everyone who comes down to site to help out.

Also a huge thank you to David (Paulines husband for constructing these steps. We definitely would not have been able to do this without you. These should be finished in a few weeks.

