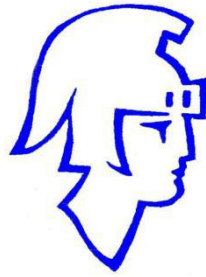


Wirksworth Archaeological Society



Annual Report 2023



and
Archaeological work at
Ian Avenue, Wirksworth, Derbyshire

Anton Shone
31st December 2023

Wirksworth Archaeological Society

Secretary's Annual Report for 2023

Progress during the year

Fieldwork this year has taken place around Ian Avenue in Wirksworth and will be described in a little more detail shortly. I am most grateful for the efforts of our members and friends in helping us undertake this work and in terms of other activities such as research notes, as well as for the kind support of Wirksworth Town Council and of Steve Baker, the County Archaeologist. We have reported regularly on our finds and research, such as in our study notes, about Wirksworth's medieval borough and its burgesses and about the local Roman lead industry, which are now on our website.

We have created a modern database of Romano-British lead ingot finds, as none of the existing published lists of ingots were on-line. The creation of this latter database has also resulted in us consulting the French undersea archaeology service about the Romano-British lead ingots found in a shipwreck at Ploumanac'h off the French Coast and reported in a journal article which attracted a lot of attention at the time (1987). Unfortunately this is a slow process and we are trying to obtain a full list and description of the ingots from the shipwreck, which the French analyst felt came from Brigantia (Yorkshire) and from the Iceni (Norfolk). Our own analysis of the report is that the Brigantian assessment is correct and the Iceni assessment is nonsense - there is no lead ore and there are no known Roman lead smelting sites in Norfolk. For this reason we have asked for photographs of the supposed Iceni ingots to determine their real origin. I am acutely aware of a long dismal record of other places "borrowing" Wirksworth's history and pretending its theirs.

I have given notice to members that the AGM of the Society will take place on Friday the 26th January 2024 at 7pm. The AGM will take place by video call using Zoom, a final notification will be issued nearer the event for members to join if they wish. There is a vacancy on the Executive Committee for a Field Officer (sets up our worksite and looks after finds), please contact me if you are interested.

Financial and membership matters 2023: We have 16 members.

Balance brought forward from 2022			£201.44
Income			
Subscriptions and Donations		£235.00	
Expenditure			
Insurance	See note 1		
Bank Charges	-£61.20		
Research and aerial photography	-£74.40		
Balance carried forward to 2023			£300.84

Note 1:

Although the financial outcome appears to have improved during the year this has only been achieved by slipping the payment date of our Public Liability Insurance back (while we are not digging). Had this been paid at its routine time then the position would be worse. In so far as this can only be done once, it is with regret that we must increase the members subscription to £20 for us to maintain a stable position next year.

In conclusion

I trust all those who have taken such an active interest in our work will continue to support us and I thank you all for your engagement and efforts on our behalf this year.

Fieldwork at Ian Avenue

This year has been mostly taken up by fieldwork associated with an investigation of a feature shown in historic photographs at Ian Avenue and adjacent areas.

Let's begin in 1950.

Here is a field once called "Warmbrook Land" between Derby Road and Water Lane, next to "Hanging Acre" (where Breasley Foam now is). In this aerial photograph you can see a faint lemon-shaped crop mark. What is this? Also, its big. For example, the circular object near the top of the picture is the old gas works storage tank ("Gas Ometer") at the corner of Summer Lane, from which we can judge the crop mark size.

North



1950 aerial photograph with a lemon-shaped crop mark in the middle of the field

All of the area which was a field in 1950 has been built on and the site, as it was, is essentially destroyed by modern housing and industrial units at the former Bainware Factory (Courtaulds), DLS Water Lane, Ian Avenue, Ecclesbourne Close and The Hawthorns.

We might have put the matter to bed after we first found the 1950 aerial photograph (in 2019), because all of it had been built on and this made possible fieldwork stupendously difficult, but a little afterwards the next photograph, from a Frith's postcard of 1963, turned up, thanks to the Ruddock family.

The postcard image was taken from Oat Hill looking south-west towards what is now Ian Avenue, where there appears to be a curved banking, shown by the red arrow. When the 1950 aerial photograph and the 1963 postcard features were overlaid on a map, it was found they were unusually close to each other, suggesting they were related, but we still didn't know what we were looking at. At this point we started looking for more photographs and appealed for local help.



1963 Postcard showing banking in the field before the DLS garage was built

The next picture, taken in 1971, was from the old Wirksworth Heritage Centre in Crown Yard, where it had hung next to the stairs for 30 years. This shows some more curved banking (on the opposite side to the 1963 postcard) where Ecclesbourne Close now is. Again we mapped the banking and again, this feature appears to relate to the others.

North



1971 aerial photograph showing the DLS garage (middle bottom)

At the time (2019/20) we were knee-deep in the Covid epidemic and in 2021 we were committed to work in the Meadows which continued until 2022. Finally, at the start of 2023, we revisited the pictures of the lemon shaped crop mark and its nearby curved banking and finally, with the kind help of the residents of Ian Avenue, we began investigating the one part of the site of the feature which may have survived, to try and identify what it was. We have a particular view, as stated in my Christmas message, but the certain identification of this feature will only become apparent if we can find standing archaeology (such as a wall - implied by the 1950 crop mark). Work will begin again after Easter.