

The CBA year can best be described as helping face challenges to archaeology.

One of the biggest challenges facing archaeology is what to do about the proposed tunnel for the A 303 at the World Heritage Site of Stonehenge. In December 2014 the Government announced a “dual carriageway bored tunnel at least 2.9km long “. Whilst this represents an improvement on the previous length of 2.1km controversy has since raged over the damage the entrance and exit portals to the tunnel will do to the archaeology of this WHS. At the eastern end there is Vespasian’s Camp with its huge Mesolithic site of Blick Mead which was the subject of a talk to the Group last year by David Jacques of the University of Buckingham.

Various views on Stonehenge were discussed at the CBA London meeting last November and archaeologists, such as Mike Parker Pearson, are in favour of a longer tunnel of 4.5 km or greater. There is a school of thought that the least damaging solution would be to forget the tunnel. Since then the CBA has formulated its approach which will be presented for approval at the AGM on 7 November. This focuses on how to guard and protect this WHS. Whatever the eventual solution, affordability will play a key deciding factor. Meanwhile the CBA has published a new book by Mike Parker Pearson and others on the recent campaign of work at this WHS. It is called “Stonehenge-Making Sense of a Prehistoric Mystery”, retailing at £14. It has a good range of drawings, photographs, and reconstructions to bring the story up to date.

The need for new housing continues unabated and poses more potential threats to archaeology. Yet another Government Housing Bill could reduce the power of planning authorities to require archaeological (and wildlife) surveys before starting construction. The CBA and other interested bodies have been in discussion with the government to ensure that when the measures are published they do not result in reduced levels of protection for our heritage. PPG 16 succeeded by the National Planning Policy Framework celebrated 25 years last November. To it can be attributed the rise in the number of professional archaeologists and the rise in developer funding for archaeological investigation prior to development. However, there is continuing concern about the effect of spending cuts on archaeology with the loss of local authority funded posts. It is hoped that the new prime Minister and Cabinet may remove the pressure but only if the money can be found. Additionally, the Brexit vote has also meant that EU measures, some of which could be beneficial to archaeology could be swept away in a Government review of what stays and what goes. The CBA is watching these developments and presenting its views to the Government at every opportunity.

A report published by Historic England in May has highlighted that there will be a significant shortfall in the number of archaeologists to deal with some 40 major infrastructure projects between 2015 & 2033, not to mention numerous house building projects. It calculates that in the next four years between 880 and 1900 FTE annually will be required. Key areas of demand are for field archaeologists, specialists and project/contract managers. Various bodies, including the CBA are working through the Archaeology Training Forum to respond to these demands. However, one cannot help thinking that we are in for a rerun of the 1970’s when amateur groups such as ourselves responded to the demand and were very successful.

In a similar vein to the shortage of archaeologists, the Department of Education has published a statement on teaching archaeology in schools from September 2017. This will mean new AS and A levels, although there was no mention of reinstating a GCSE. The CBA is campaigning for such reinstatement. Allied to this the YAC scheme is continuing to grow and last year received a EU prize for Cultural Heritage/Europa Nostra award in the category of Education, Training and Awareness. This was celebrated at the November meeting.

On a more positive note, the Government has finally announced it will ratify the 1954 Hague Convention and its two Protocols. These will protect cultural property in the event of a conflict. A Bill was published and given its First Reading in the Lords in May. The legislation will support the two protocols, making it an offence to deal in cultural property illegally exported from a conflict area. There will be the power to seize and return such objects to the owner country at the end of a conflict. The other protocol makes it an offence to attack cultural property in time of conflict.

In July Beatrice de Cardi died. At 102 she was the country's oldest archaeologist. She was the first employee of the CBA, being appointed initially as Assistant Secretary in the Summer of 1949 and served for 24 years during which she built the organisation up into a major force for the progression of archaeology. She reflected last year that her greatest achievement was the gradual process of getting archaeologists embedded in local authorities, sadly now threatened by the squeeze on public spending. She also introduced the "Calendar of Excavations" which listed excavations open to volunteers which many of us, no doubt recall and participated in. Two years ago the CBA headquarters in York was renamed "Beatrice de Cardi House" in honour of her 100th birthday. In 1973 she was awarded an OBE by HM the Queen and an annual lecture was established by the CBA. So far there have been 37 lectures and she attended every one. I remember her at last year's lecture by Mike Parker Pearson on his work at Stonehenge. Sitting two rows behind her I was struck by her alertness and interest in the proceedings. The series will continue and this November will be on the excavations at Must Farm in the Fens. Beatrice also excavated widely in the Gulf and founded the Society for Arabian Studies.

The regional group, CBA East, had a good year of events. These included a walk around the Iron Age hillfort of Ravensburgh Castle in Hertfordshire and, a guided walk by Nick Wickendon around Pleshey Castle. In September there was a conference at Bury St Edmunds on Anglo Saxon Rendelsham. The group is worth joining and is only £5 which includes a discount off the annual conference. Details can be found at www.archaeologyUK.org/cbae

The CBA's national bi-monthly magazine "British Archaeology" is well worth the annual subscription of £31. Alternatively, a subscription to the national CBA starts at £38 including the magazine and offers discounts on publications. Details can be found at www.archaeologyUK.org

There is no doubt the CBA faces a challenging year ahead to counter the threats to archaeology, something it is well placed to accomplish.