

A Short History of SOAG

(South Oxfordshire Archaeological Group)

1969 – 2026

Version 1.0

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Historical variations of SOAG's logo

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Preface

SOAG was founded in 1969 as an amateur archaeology society. In retrospect this was at a turning point in the history of archaeology in Britain. It is worth recalling the environment for archaeology then compared with now. For most of modern history until after SOAG's creation, most archaeology was undertaken by non-professionals, typically led by leisured gentlemen of wealth and education, and with supporting participation by an increasingly affluent middle class and frequently using indentured servants for the hard labour. Later, professional associations, with interests in history, geography, and the environmental sciences, sponsored much archaeology field work; Universities began to teach and sponsor archaeology, and, occasionally, the government (under the Ministry of Works) did so as well. But the concept of archaeology as a profession barely existed, so most participation could still largely be classed as 'amateur'. In addition, there was very little regulation controlling what archaeologists could and could not do, nor a body of standards. The only protection of very important sites dated from the Scheduled Monuments Act in 1880 but which did not assume its current scope until 1979. Otherwise, if the landowner agreed, archaeologists could do very much what they liked.

This was still largely the situation when SOAG was founded in 1969.

This state of affairs had started to become an issue when the public became increasingly alarmed by the archaeology that was being lost or damaged in the rebuilding of our cities after WW2, and new housing estates spread across rural areas. But the organisation and regulation of archaeology did not change very much till the mid-1970s and 80s - after SOAG's foundation.

From Historic England's website:

In the early 1970s, public pressure led to a dramatic increase in government funding. New local or regional archaeological organisations were set up to respond to planned development. A network of local authority advisory services and record systems (today's Historic Environment Records) was also created. In the 1980s, 'professionalisation' increased: what is now the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA) was formed [in 1982] to set and maintain professional standards in archaeology, and rigorous project management was emphasised.

These developments changed the role of truly amateur archaeology, including for societies such as SOAG. Amateurs could not now be solely in charge of important archaeology, nor, in the case of most development-related archaeology (now by far the largest sector), have any role at all. [It is questionable whether some of SOAG's earliest activities in the 1970s, could have been undertaken as easily, or at all, in today's more controlled and regulated environment.]

SOAG therefore had to become opportunistic in finding projects to pursue, filling the gaps where neither professionals (mandated by the local authorities), nor universities, had any direct interest, and Scheduled Monument restrictions did not prevent access.

Many of the opportunities for SOAG that did arise came, perhaps paradoxically, from establishing good relationships with: (a) the new local professional archaeologist companies (including the local universities); (b) the various new heritage organisations; and (c) the local planning authorities themselves who now had the prime role in policing local archaeology. [And, not least, of course the permission of the landowners of the sites that interested us]. Examples of these opportunities are covered in this document, where we illustrate, where possible, what SOAG's 'in' to a project was.

A good example was our longest-running project (of 26 years), Gatehampton Roman Villa, which was a spinoff from archaeology undertaken by Oxford Archaeology (OA) in the 1980s prior to a major engineering project by Thames Water near the river. At their project's completion SOAG was

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encouraged by OA to continue and extend the archaeology, and was also supported in this by the county planning authorities once they saw that we had the necessary expertise; and both continued to offer us practical advice and support. (But note, unfortunately none of the new central funding that was becoming available for archaeology!).

In summary, despite the demise of many amateur societies that were set up at the same time as SOAG, amateur archaeology in Britain, including SOAG, has found its role and is currently in a generally healthy state. [This is in contrast to much of Europe where the forces of professionalisation described above have resulted in a situation where, to quote Tim Allen of OA in a lecture he gave to the SOAG a while ago, which included OA's experiences in France: "*It would probably be impossible for an organisation like SOAG to exist there*"! That is true of other European countries as well. Britain possesses something special - even unique - with its active amateur archaeology societies!]

The story that follows is about when, how and why SOAG was created, and how it has not only survived but has prospered in the 57 years of its existence.

Mike Green, June 2026

A note on SOAG project nomenclature.

This document includes frequent references to specific SOAG projects. The society adopted names for its projects which are not always self-explanatory about where the sites are and what the projects were about. For example, whilst it is easy to work out from its title where the *Gatehampton Roman Villa* project is and what it was about, it is less so with, for example, the *High Wood*, *Greys Mound*, and *Smokedown* projects.

These project titles are partially explained herein, but we have stuck to using them as it makes it much easier for readers to research more about the projects in our archives, where these labels are consistently used. A further edition of this History will find a way of being more explicit about these project's locations (e.g. use of OS refs) and their purpose.

SOAG's foundation

In the Spring of 1969 *Dr Cecil Slade* from the Archaeology Department at Reading University and a leading archaeology light in the region, was running some excavations at Bozedom Camp, an Iron Age Hill Fort on a ridge of the Chilterns north of Whitchurch village. *Cynthia Graham Kerr*, who lived less than half a mile away, in Whitchurch Hill, approached Cecil and asked if she and some of her friends could participate, to which he agreed, and then subsequently offered to provide the team with further training in archaeological techniques.

The team immediately began to look around for other opportunities to engage in their new-found enthusiasm, and at a meeting at the 15th Century home of Cynthia and her husband Adam in Whitchurch Hill, it was decided to form a society. On May 22nd 1969 the *South Oxfordshire Archaeological Group (SOAG)* was created in order to promote and coordinate their activities. Initially there were 11 members. (Dr Slade was a founder member and became a long-term friend and mentor to SOAG).

By September 1969 this small number of members had grown to 28 and had already undertaken a wide variety of visits and fieldwork. A flavour of this can be seen in the summary account in September of just their first two months of activity, recorded in the first edition of the society's newsletter, *SOAG Bulletin* No 1.

"Since the July meeting we have had 4 days at Fieldwork, two to the Roman Well [Ed: at Ipsden], when we let down Tweedledum (the hurricane light) to 110ft. when he touched bottom and went out, showing the presence of gas. Dr. Slade then gave an impromptu lecture on conducting a dig - most welcome.

On Aug. 23rd [1969] we did a round of oddments, finding a new earthwork at Digbury [Ed: note that SOAG returned as recently as 2022 to examine and re-survey this site]; some sarsen stones along lanes, a curious site at Conduit Cottages, and visited Pat Leigh to see her lovely old bottle of glass (circa 340 AD.).

A short visit was paid to Nuffield to view the road John Shearer has discovered opposite the Church and we decided to mark this out properly and continue.

One member went to Dr. Slade's dig at Maidenhead and learnt much, and three to Burghfield, all day, (one full-time all the week) which was hard work but interesting although there is little to find beyond flint walls.

We are to have a Press write-up probably in the Reading Mercury and/or Evening Post, offered by journalist Mrs. Ritchings"

A year later we have what maybe the first report, and photo, in a local paper, the Reading Evening Post, of one of the first significant excavations by SOAG – the discovery and excavation of what was initially thought to be a medieval watchtower at *Lilley Farm in Mapledurham* (but eventually turned out to be a later structure). This was SOAG's first attempt to establish a long-term project at which it could develop its skills and establish a reputation for, as the SOAG chairman of the time Bill Fowler put it, 'doing archaeology properly'. (See also *Some Example SOAG projects*, later.)

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Result of
Every Post
Expedition
on Aug. 4th
Sep. 27th

Medieval tower unearthed?

MEMBERS of the South Oxfordshire Archaeological Group have stumbled on what they think is the remains of a medieval building at Mapledurham.

And the group is now busy excavating on the moated-site at Lilley Farm, Mapledurham.

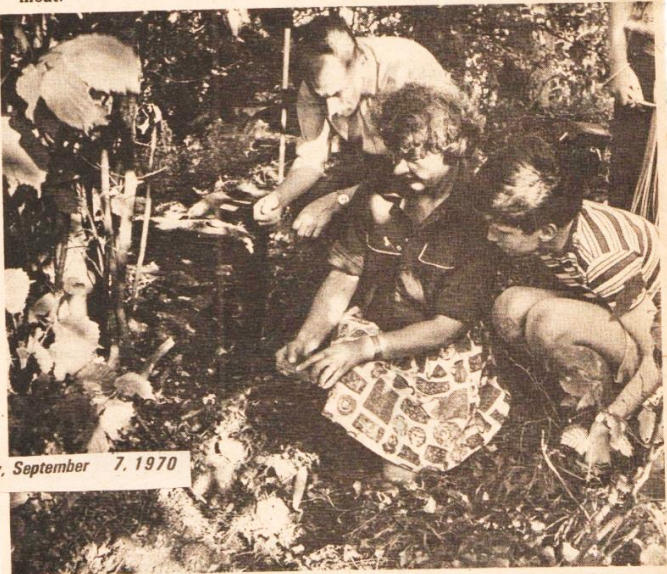
Mrs Cynthia Graham-Kerr, the group's president, who was working at the site, said: "One of our members, Mr Dick Fallowfield, his wife and son were walking through a field near the farm and saw the moat.

"When we came over we noticed some stonework in a rabbit burrow on the island surrounded by the moat.

"We have excavated about seven feet of wall and believe that possibly the building here was a medieval watch tower because it would be possible to see a long way across into Berkshire if the trees were not down by the Thames.

"We have found yellowish plaster and scratches on stones which indicate that the building could be medieval."

Mrs Graham-Kerr, who lives at the Thatched Cottage, Whitchurch Hill, near Reading, said both Mapledurham and Hardwick, near Whitchurch, were involved in the Civil War and the building might have been destroyed then.



■ Mrs Graham-Kerr and her son, Alistair, 12, work with Mr Peter Skinner, of Norcot Road, Reading at the excavation site

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Press coverage of one of SOAG's earliest excavation in 1971 (original is in Cynthia's logbooks - see later)

[Note the young boy on the right of the photo, Alistair Graham Kerr, son of our founder, who at the time of writing (2026) is a lifetime member of SOAG. He now resides in East Anglia and is still active in archaeology, being a local participant at the famous Venta Icenorum (Caistor Roman Town) project. He is the first of many lifetime archaeologists whose enthusiasm for the subject began with SOAG.]

The society was now fully up and running, already with a mix of fieldwork, lectures and visits that has remained the staple of the society's activities to the current day. Examples of these are described later in this document.

Cynthia Graham Kerr



Any account of SOAG's history must be begin with a description of the dominant role and contributions, of its founder Cynthia Graham Kerr, spanning the society's first 30+ years. (Photo left, Cyn still in the trenches in 2009). Janet Sharpe, a prominent member of SOAG from the 1980s to the present day, and a good friend of Cynthia, described this well in her obituary for Cyn in 2011.

"Cyn's strong character and determination were responsible for creating an archaeological society that continues to flourish today, whereas so many of its contemporaries have fallen by the wayside. SOAG was founded in May 1969, at a time when public interest in archaeology was undergoing a strong revival, assisted by the boom in

adult education and the wide choice of courses available at the time. Cyn came relatively late to archaeology but in so doing discovered her métier.

Times changed and the prominence of amateurs in archaeology declined with the growth of the professional units in the late 1970s and 1980s and more recently with the closure of some university extramural departments and other opportunities for continuing education at affordable prices. SOAG weathered all this, thanks to Cyn's overwhelming enthusiasm – and her persistence and powers of persuasion in continually recruiting new members and seeking new opportunities for members to take part in.

She was the queen bee who controlled every aspect of the SOAG hive for nearly 40 years until increasing age and poor health eventually persuaded her to relax her grip. Even then she remained as SOAG's figurehead [as SOAG President] until the day of her death in 2011."

What was (and still is) 'a SOAG'?

Almost from the beginning, SOAG members have colloquially been called 'SOAGs'. The first record of the term dates to August 1972 in a *SOAG Messenger* entry titled: "The President's Definition of a S.O.A.G."

"Soags may be found all over the southern area of Oxfordshire. One frequently spots them on field walks, along hedges and in woodland, with a scatter of sherds about them. They also occur on most rescue sites, usually in the crouch position, in a trench together with small metal implements and pottery. Some date back a considerable time, others are so small they are difficult to spot, but all show signs of great activity. They used to be rather scarce, but more and more are being discovered, often in unlikely places, and the whole group is co-ordinated and correlated at Langtree School". [SOAG's meeting venue of the time]. Cynthia Graham Kerr.)

The term stuck!

SOAG's geographical area of operation

Notwithstanding the challenges for amateur groups in archaeology in the 1970s and 80s there soon existed several other archaeology societies locally. These included societies in Henley (HAHG), Wallingford (TWHAS), Marlow (two societies; MAG and AiM - now merged with the Maidenhead Society into one - MMHAS), Abingdon (AAASHS), and two societies south of the Thames in Berkshire, BAS and BARG. All of which have been (and in some cases still are) active in South Oxfordshire itself. Cynthia therefore decided in the late 1970s to create a map showing the geographical area in which SOAG would focus its activities (shown overleaf...).

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This map has occasionally been controversial, seeming to put operational boundaries between SOAG and its neighbours. (And what do those arrows in the southeast represent - an invasion from Henley?! And note also the 'concession' of Crowmarsh Gifford to the Wallingford group)

In practice, in its subsequent history SOAG has collaborated on projects with all its neighbours. And throughout its history, many of the more active SOAG members have also been members of adjacent societies: several of our projects have been joint ones arising from the relationships thus engendered. A few examples being: *Blewbury Big Dig*, *BBCHAP community project*, *Emmer Green Bronze Age Rings*, *Cold Harbour Farm* and, recently, *Chinnor community project*.

And geographically SOAG's own in-house projects have spanned widely outside this area: from *High Wood*, near Henley, in the east; to *Smokedown Farm* near Faringdon in the west; and *Simms Farm* near Bicester in the north

SOAG's operating model has been to seize opportunities to provide fieldwork for its members wherever they have arisen whilst remaining primarily focussed on South Oxfordshire.

SOAG fieldwork projects – some examples

The following list is a sample of significant SOAG field projects, chosen in part to exemplify the wide variety of ways in which SOAG projects have been initiated, managed and sponsored.

- Lilley Farm, Mapledurham 1971 - 1973
- M40 pre-construction archaeology, 1972
- Newington House, Newington, 1984 – 2007
- Gatehampton Roman Villa, 1993 – 2019
- Brightwell Baldwin Community History and Archaeology Project (BBCHAP), 2006 – 2013
- Bix Gibwyn, search for a lost medieval church, 2007 – 2010
- Emmer Green Bronze Age rings survey, 2013
- Blewbury Big Dig, 2012 – 2018
- Lithics of the Chiltern Slopes, 2009 - 2017
- High Wood Romano- British Temple, 2015 - 2021
- Wyfold Manor, 2019 - 2023
- Smokedown Farm, 2020 - 2026

Further details of the scope, leadership and results of these projects are provided in a table in the **Annex** at the end of this document, and also in the digital archives and Past Projects page of the SOAG website.

In most cases these projects arose opportunistically through the informal relationships that SOAG members have established with external organisations, including with:

- local professional companies;
- neighbouring archaeology and history societies;
- other heritage organisations, (such as the VCH);
- local metal detectorists.

Almost always the projects have then been authorised and otherwise supported by the Oxfordshire County Council Planning Department's Archaeology Officers.

The quoted end dates for the projects listed here are usually when the fieldwork finished, but as with almost all such projects – professional or amateur - producing and publishing final reports can take many years – and the reports of some of the projects below are still being written.

Landscape Archaeology

Giving prominence to SOAG's fieldwork excavations runs the risk of not recording SOAG's significant history in the field of *Landscape Archaeology* (LA). Indeed, in the 1970s and 80s this was arguably SOAG's most significant area of contribution to local archaeology. Three people are worthy of mention here as they generally functioned as a team: *Pat Preece*, *Marion Fallowfield* and *Mary Kift*. They didn't 'dig holes in the ground', but researched topics such as place names, field names, historic boundaries, local historic buildings and their ownership, etc. Such research often underpins fieldwork that may follow.

Pat, in particular, became a major LA figure in the region, publishing research in local and national journals as well as SOAG's own publications. [There was a story that Pat once took a residential course in medieval Latin in order that she could personally translate charters now in Canterbury relating to Oxford colleges which own land of interest to us in South Oxfordshire. The author checked with Pat herself, and the story was true!] SOAG's recent projects have often started by researching what Pat in particular may already have discovered about a location.

In recent years there has been a revival of Landscape Archaeology in SOAG, mainly under the leadership of *Liz Surrey*.

National Trust Monitoring partnership.

During the 1990s and 2000s SOAG had a partnership agreement with the local region of the National Trust. The NT not only owns and runs historic buildings, but also owns much landscape of historic or cultural value. However, they are always short of resources to monitor the condition of these assets. The Monitoring arrangement with SOAG was for us at least once a year to walk and report on the detailed condition of a number of NT properties. The NT areas which at various times we took responsibility for included:

- Coombe End Farm ditch and bank,

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- The grounds at Basildon and Greys Court.
- The Holies (the landscape above Streatley) – this responsibility was joint with our society neighbours, BARG.
- Pangbourne Meadows

The arrangement is believed to have ended when the local NT region lost its dedicated archaeologist.

SOAG Lecture series

From the very beginnings, in 1969, SOAG has hosted lectures for its members. These have usually given priority to, in order, (a) local speakers, (b) local topics, and (c) national topics if we could get national speakers, which we often have!

Lectures have usually been run during the 6 months over winter when SOAG fieldwork has generally been at a minimum, and as such they served the purpose of maintaining SOAG as a socially cohesive society.

Photo right: Our chairman Dave Carless (left) in 2021 introducing Dr Steve Kershaw to talk about “The Ashmolean Museum (in Oxford) and its Classical Connections”



The organisation of lectures in the early years was often opportunistic, frequently being arranged at very short notice. It was many years before an advance schedule was advertised. But later, the commissioning and running of lectures was taken on by a nominated committee member. The longest serving was *Nancy Nichols* - from 2010 – 2020. (Nancy also organised, in the same period, SOAG’s Visits programme: see below.)

After 2005 a special class of lecture was instituted; presentations on all active SOAG projects given by the project leaders, at SOAG’s AGM meeting in April – although in the last few years this has moved to the Christmas social meeting in early December.

The venue for SOAG lectures has always been a little controversial largely caused by SOAG’s wide geographical area – which is mainly rural, unlike our neighbouring societies who mostly have an urban membership and lecture centre. The easiest thing would be for SOAG to use an urban centre, which would have public transport, but the main local urban centres in our area (e.g. Goring, Caversham, Henley) are on our territorial boundary and are always some distance from many of our widely spread members. So we haven’t used them – except for Goring occasionally. Accordingly, our standard venue has moved around rural South Oxfordshire, but has not changed very often. The primary venues used have been: Langborough School – near Woodcote (1970s and 80s); Goring Heath Parish Hall - actually in Whitchurch Hill (1990s and 2000s), and from 2021 Sonning Common Village Hall. Even these venues have been controversial as many of our members do not like driving in the dark in winter – perhaps an inevitable issue wherever we go. The introduction of online “Zoom” based lectures helps to alleviate this in the middle of winter!

SOAG Visits

A regular part of SOAG's programme since its inception has been organising visits to venues of interest. In the early days (the 1970s) it was a significant part of SOAG's offering to its members. There were typically 6 or more per year. As with the SOAG lectures at that time these were often arranged at very short notice. But in recent years the frequency has reduced to one or two per year.

Visits have been to the following types of venue, which name just a few examples:

- Local archaeology services of importance to how SOAG does it work: for example, several visits to the Oxfordshire County Museums Resource Centres at Standlake and Woodstock. This has educated us on how and where our finds and records are preserved and how we should interact with the centres.
- Local Professional archaeology companies. We have had several visits to, for example, Oxford Archaeology's HQ. These have focussed on educating us on how key archaeology processes are undertaken by the professionals, such as bones and pottery analysis – sometime even using specimens from SOAG digs.
- Ongoing professional digs. Since the late 1970s we have regularly sought, or been offered the opportunity to visit, ongoing professional digs in our locality – including too many to list here - run by: Oxford Archaeology, TVAS, Cotswold Archaeology, Foundations Archaeology, John Moore Heritage Services, Dig Ventures, and others (most of which organisations incidentally did not exist when SOAG was founded.)
- Sites of general local historic interest, with expert guides. A few examples that have been visited several times by SOAG include: Wittenham Clumps Iron Age hill forts, Wallingford Castle, and Butser Ancient Farm. (The latter has been visited at least 4 times(!), the most recent being in 2026.)

(Photo right; SOAG visit to Wallingford Castle in June 2011. Our expert guide – front left – was Judy Dewey, the leader of TWHAS, the local archaeology society)



The visits have often included a pub meal or a tea shop visit and, like the SOAG lectures, have served as a social function.

The organisation of these visits in SOAG's early days was very ad hoc but, as for SOAG's lecture programme, from 2010 to 2020 was wholly organised by *Nancy Nichols*.

Geophysics in SOAG

During SOAG's lifetime, archaeology has been transformed by the 'appliance of science.' The most transformative technologies have been in the field of geophysical surveying. The techniques of *resistivity*, *magnetometry*, and *GPR* (Ground Penetrating Radar) in particular, have been around for several decades but for most of that time the tools were expensive and the province of professionals only. In the 21st century have they become more affordable, and usable, by non-professionals, including SOAG.

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Other technologies have also been used on SOAG sites as they have become affordable, such as Drone Photography, 3D Photogrammetry, Carbon Dating, LiDAR, and, not least, Metal Detecting and Dowsing.

Here are the dates and sites of SOAG's first use of these technologies:

Geophysical surveying

Resistivity: SOAG's first conduct of a *resistivity* survey was at Gatehampton Villa in the early 2000s. An outside specialist brought along a machine (make and model not known) which entailed noting every reading by hand and plotting the resultant survey, again by hand, onto graph paper with coloured pencils(!). No cheap PC software available then to do the data capture and image analysis. [The result is in the Gatehampton archive.] The first fully in-house survey was conducted in 2004 by *Geoff Deakin*, a member who had been a career geophysicist, using his own machine (make and model not known). This all changed in 2007 when the BBCHAP community project (see earlier) acquired a Geoscan RM15 meter via a Heritage Lottery grant, which the project later donated to SOAG. The new SOAG meter was used for the first time in September 2007 at the Cadwell Farm survey (*as recorded in the contemporary photo, right, operated by Phil Hughes and Kaz Greenham.*) Ian Clarke was the SOAG expert who then processed the resulting geophys data.



Our first resistivity pseudo-section survey (a vertical 2D slice) was undertaken by SOAG at Greys Mound in 2008, supervised by Gerard Latham of TWHAS using his borrowed specialised equipment. (Photo right: Gerard, on the right, controlling the kit, with his SOAG 'helpers' in a line on the left, and the resulting survey image below. The section was taken across the Mound and shows a central solid 'cairn' plus a surrounding ring ditch.)



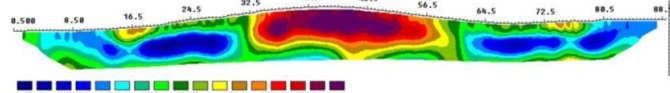
The RM15 was our main geophys resistivity resource until 2018 when a new

generation device, the TR Systems Mk2,

came to market at a significantly lower

cost and with much improved functionality. This was purchased using SOAG's Cynthia Graham Kerr

Legacy Bequest, and is our current resistivity tool.



Magnetometry: SOAG's first use of magnetometry was also by *Geoff Deakin*. He owned a Geoscan FM 18 magnetometer and in the early 2000s used it to survey the wider landscape around *Gatehampton Farm*, the output from which became the prime means by which we eventually located the villa itself. Geoff then donated his machine to SOAG and it was used at nearly all SOAG sites until 2015. In the early 2000s SOAG also occasionally rented magnetometry machines, and, from 2007 on, sometimes persuaded Reading University to use our sites as a practice place for their own students – the best example being at Greys Mound. (Photo right - young and old SOAGs using magnetometers borrowed from Reading University in 2009).

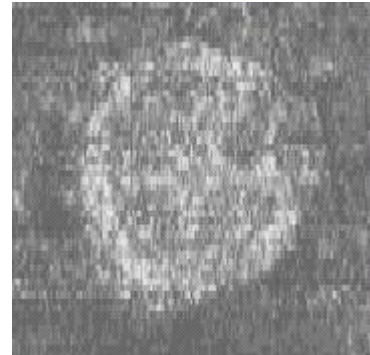


Since about 2015 SOAG surveys have mainly been led by member *Richard Miller* using his own, more modern and functional, twin-pole Bartington 601 magnetometer (the model in the above photo)

GPR: Our first use of *GPR* was at the Greys Mound project in 2010. The system was loaned to SOAG by Reading University and helped us construct a 3D profile of the Bronze Age mound, and to reveal that the mound entombed a complex structure (see below) This is an expensive and complex-to-use technology and SOAG is currently researching how to gain greater access to it.



First GPR use in SOAG, in 2010 at Greys Mound



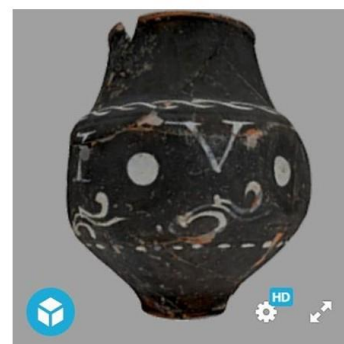
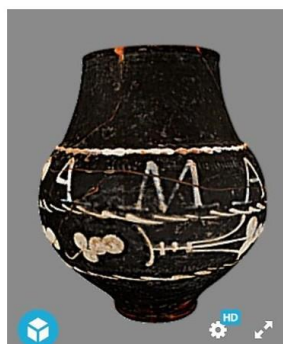
GPR 'slice' showing that the apparently solid central 'cairn' was in fact a 5-spoked chambered building – with lower image slices indicating this was on top of an earlier rectangular Neolithic structure.

Other technologies used by SOAG

Drone photography: our first use of drones to provide aerial survey photos of a site was by member Keith Dallimore in 2013 at our *Emmer Green Bronze Age Rings* site using his own drone. (Photo right – Keith at centre with the controller, and at left Dave Oliver, SOAG chairman at the time). The device itself, on the right of the photo, then cost about £6k – to compare with today's cost for a drone with camera and controller of about £500!



3D Photogrammetry: Our first use of *3D photogrammetry*, both of open trenches and also to record special finds, was by SOAG *Richard Miller* in 2014 at Gatehampton Roman villa using his own cameras and the online Sketchfab software to produce the 3D outputs. Notable examples of his work were 3D models of the two Trier 'motto beakers' excavated at Gatehampton which may be the most complete examples of the type ever found in the UK. (Photo: the Amantida and Iuvat beakers, named after the mottos that circumscribed them. These are Sketchfab screenshots. Operational 3D links can be found on the SOAG website or directly on the Sketchfab.com website. Photos courtesy of Richard Miller).



LiDAR LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) is an active remote sensing technology that uses laser pulses from aircraft to create high-resolution 3D maps of the ground surface, a highly valuable resource for archaeologists as it can reveal details of the past environment that are otherwise hard to detect on the ground, especially under tree cover. The UK Environment Agency produced the first publicly available maps covering our area in medium resolution in the early 2000s, which were sporadically accessed by various SOAG projects.

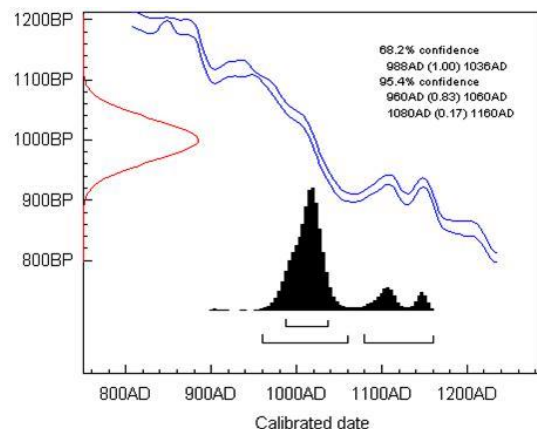
But the first significant use, and public contribution, by SOAG began in 2019 when we became partners in the *Chilterns Beacons of the Past* project, in which SOAG was given privileged access to the data from the first high resolution (0.25m) Lidar survey of the Chilterns, and a team of SOAG volunteers contributed to the processing and analysis of the data in the SOAG area.



The resulting maps and lists of archaeological features revealed are available to all today. *Image above: a previously unknown pre-historic ring ditch revealed and marked in a Lidar image by a SOAG member.*

Other technologies have become increasingly affordable for amateur societies, most notably in the area of post-ex analysis of environmental samples. Perhaps the most significant of these has been:

C14 radiocarbon dating. The first use of this technique in SOAG was in 2009 at the Bix dig seeking a lost medieval church (see above) at which carbon dating was able to date three skeletal remains to the 10-14th C. (*Picture right: one the skeletons here dated by C14 to 988-1030AD at the 68.2% confidence level.*) The funding for this was provided by our project sponsors, the VCH.



More recently we have also been able to carbon date the ditches at Wyfold Manor and to pin their construction date to the 10thC (i.e. late Saxon). But the C14 process is expensive so rarely used at SOAG sites.

Metal detecting

The relationship between metal detecting and archaeology has historically been problematic. Archaeologists often regarded metal detectorists with suspicion, seeing them as opportunists who didn't record their finds properly, thereby missing the context of important archaeological material. This may account for there being little or nothing in SOAG's record about metal detecting as a method used in our field projects, till the 2010s.



Relationships were then reset, with each discipline increasingly understanding the support that each can offer the other. SOAG struck up a relationship with the most prominent metal detecting society in Oxfordshire –the Oxford Blues principally via its leader, *Rob Wadley*, who eventually became a SOAG member. The first SOAG project to use metal detecting seriously was probably Greys Mound in 2009. More recently SOAG has several metal detectorists in its own ranks, most notably *Lindsey Bedford* and *Lois Rock*. (Photo left: SOAG Lindsey Bedford in 2016 demonstrating her metal detector near Exlade Street where SOAG was assisting member Ken Hume understand the history of a woodland plot that he owns.)

Detectorists main methods are: prior to any digging they survey the site, alongside the geophysicists, scanning the ground for near-surface finds and recording their locations. And then during digging they scan the spoil heaps for finds that have been missed by the archaeologists in the trenches. They have taught SOAG archaeologists the importance of maintaining context-related spoil heaps; and in return SOAG archaeology has offered the detectorists more opportunities to ‘do their thing’. Several important finds have been made at SOAG sites in this manner and properly recorded, which would otherwise have been missed. The most notable recent sites where this has been done have been *Greys Mound*, *High Wood*, *Wyfold* and *Smokedown*. Any residual conflict between the two disciplines has long been resolved within SOAG.

Dowsing

The use of dowsing as a tool in archaeology has always been controversial. In the words used to advertise a conference on dowsing in Oxfordshire in 2007: *“Dowsing was once the only ‘geophysical’ research technique available and is still a mysterious and controversial subject”*.

Nevertheless, dowsing has been frequently used in SOAG’s past. Its most notable proponents in SOAG have been *Janet Sharpe* and *Phil Carter*. They have dowsed at several major SOAG digs, most notably at Gatehampton Roman Villa (the first dowsing survey being right at the beginning of the dig in 1993). In addition, they have dowsed at Bix, Greys Mound, and HighWood. They have also dowsed the routes of conjectured Roman roads running from Pangbourne to Benson, and from Dorchester-on-Thames to Cuxham. (All projects are recorded in SOAG’s digital archives).

Other SOAG proponents of dowsing included *David Nichols* and *Geoff Deakin* who in 2009 extended our survey of the primary site of Greys Mound into adjacent fields and recorded dowsing evidence of what they believed to be further mounds; at a location we eventually called the ‘Greys 2’ project (a site now largely under a modern wildlife cemetery).

Publications

SOAG's Newsletter and Journal



A SOAG Bulletin



A SOAG Messenger

At the creation of SOAG in 1969 it was decided immediately to publish a newsletter. This was called *SOAG Bulletin* which initially was published several times a year. It was largely news, with occasional semi-formal detailed reports of SOAG archaeology. Printed copies were delivered by hand across Oxfordshire to members by a dedicated team. In 1981 it was decided that SOAG needed to separate the news element from project reports. *SOAG Bulletin* became SOAG's 'journal of record' and a new document, *SOAG Messenger*, was created as primarily a news vehicle for members.

Since about 1985 *SOAG Bulletin* has been an annual production which every SOAG member has qualified for a printed copy. SOAG's goal since then has been to produce *SOAG Bulletin* to academic journal standards, but using SOAG-only resources. This has often required a team to produce it: article authors, senior editor, sub editors, layout specialist, and print-production skills. Over the years it has been well served by the many SOAG members who have stepped up to the mark – too many to list here. This printing and distribution process has made it a significant cost item consuming, in a typical year, 25-30% of our annual budget. Copies have always been lodged with national and local deposit libraries.

Beginning in 2015 the archive of both document series have been fully digitised and been available on the SOAG website.

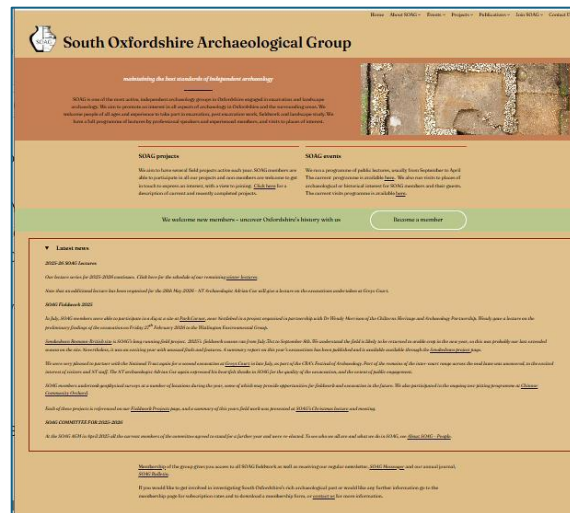
SOAG's website

SOAG's first *website* was implemented in January 2006, the designer/webmaster being *Steve Gibson*. *Mike Green* took over in 2009. Its scope has been expanded several times since then, most notably to become the repository of SOAG's digitised archives. The website address has always been: www.soagarch.org.uk.

The website's original technical implementation however rendered it difficult to maintain and update, which became a growing problem, and a new version was implemented in 2025 by *Chris Pollard* to a new design and using modern website development tools, which will make it simpler to maintain and update.

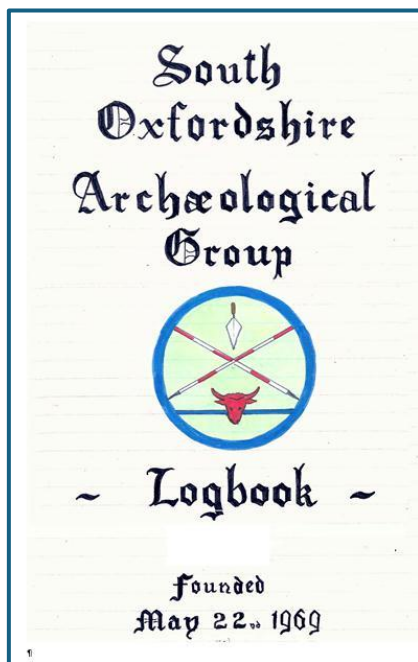


The launch edition of the SOAG website in January 2006. Until the relaunch in 2025, subsequent versions were graphically an evolution of the above.



The new SOAG website launched in late 2025

Cynthia Graham Kerr's logbooks



From that very first meeting of SOAG in May 1969, Cynthia kept meticulous notes on all SOAG's activities in a foolscap size logbook, which she maintained as an almost daily log from 1969 to the beginning of 2009. The resulting 5-volume series provides a precious record, not only of SOAG's accomplishments over this long time-span, but also includes often humorous anecdotes concerning our past and present. The original beautifully handwritten and illustrated logbooks (Cyn was a graphic artist by training) are now stored in the Oxford History Centre. They are also available in digital form; in 2020 the contents were transcribed - by *Alan Hall* - and are available on the SOAG website in searchable form.

Other publications

In addition, some of our more significant research has also been published in external reputable journals, mainly *Oxoniensia*, and the *CBA South Midlands Journal*, and elsewhere in subject-specialist journals.

SOAG structure, and the development of a constitution

SOAG Chairmen

For its first 30+ years SOAG was a loosely organised society, run by a committee. *SOAG chairmen* during this period, and to the present, were:

1969-1972:	Cynthia Graham Kerr*
1972-1979:	W J (Bill) Fowler
1980-1990:	Cynthia Graham Kerr
1991-1999:	Dan Miles
2000-2004:	Pat Preece

A short history of SOAG

2005:	Mike Fulton
2006- 2009:	Ian Clarke
2010-2013:	Dave Oliver
2014:	Committee rotation
2015-2022:	Dave Carless
2022-2026	Chris Pollard

* In 1972 the roles of President and Chairman were split. Cynthia Graham was appointed to be Founder President in perpetuity. In 2005 Cynthia was also appointed SOAG Honorary Member.

SOAG Patron

In 1983 SOAG acquired a Patron: *Malcolm Airs OBE*. Malcom was, and is, professor of conservation and the historic environment at Kellogg College, Oxford, and Professor in the Department of Education. His main research work focussed on the building processes and craftsmanship of the Tudor and Stuart periods. Over several years in the 70s and 80s he was especially helpful to SOAG on number of projects and responded positively to Cynthia's request to lend his name to our society.

SOAG constitution

In 2009 It was decided to put the society on a more formal footing. In a project led by committee member *Ian Clarke*, SOAG constructed a new constitution setting out its goals and formalising its administration. (The constitution defined then is the current one and can be found on SOAG's website).

Charity Status

One goal in 2009 was to construct the constitution in a manner that would enable the society to apply for charity status. The latter did not happen at the time for technical reasons, although from 2009 onwards we have qualified for one of the benefits of charitable status at the Inland Revenue, and have been receiving tax relief on our membership subscriptions since then. (The topic of our charity status is being considered again at the time of writing.)

Academic qualifications

Many SOAG members have acquired academic qualifications (Bachelor and Masters degrees, and PhDs) in archaeology and related subjects, often using their experiences on SOAG projects as contributory material. The following are just a few.

- Hazel Williams (Reading University)
- Tom Walker (Reading University)
- Cara Redding (Reading University)
- Peter Shackleton
- Janet Eastment (Winchester University)
- Lindsey Bedford (Bristol University)
- Abigail Lloyd (Oxford University)

(More to be added in future editions.)



Cara and Tom celebrating the awarding of their archaeology degrees at a party at Gatehampton in 2009

Honorary SOAG members, and their accomplishments

In the 1990s SOAG began the process of honouring particular SOAG members (and others) who have made memorable and lasting contributions to SOAG. The following is the list, as of 2026, describing their particular contributions.

Pat Preece,
former SOAG chairman



Pat, joined SOAG in the mid-seventies, served on the committee for nearly 30 years and was for five years its chairman. But her major contribution to SOAG has been through her research. For nearly 40 years, Pat investigated the history of South Oxfordshire using as her primary sources the landscape itself, the memories of local people, and historical maps and documents, and was responsible for establishing Landscape Archaeology as an essential and integral part of field research in SOAG.

Margaret Westwood,
former SOAG
committee member



Margaret joined SOAG in the early 1980s and took part in all the key excavations of that period including the original work with Oxford Archeology that led to SOAG's long term project at the Roman Villa. But perhaps Margaret's most important contribution to SOAG has been her 12 years as Hon Secretary from the early 1980s to the mid 1990s, and after stepping down from this role, continuing to help organize tea and coffee at lectures for several years.

Robin Cloke
former landowner,
Gatehampton Roman
Villa Site



Ever since SOAG's excavation of the Roman Villa commenced on his land in the early 1990s Robin was an excellent host, generously allowing SOAG the use of his utilities, providing space for storage, and land for parking. Without this practical support, not to mention Robin's regular good-humoured welcome, SOAG's longest running project would not have been the success that it became.

Cynthia Graham Kerr
SOAG founder, and
former Chairman



See elsewhere in this document for Cynthia's achievements.

A short history of SOAG

Tim Allen

Senior project manager,
Oxford Archaeology



Tim Allen was leader of a major archaeology project in the 1980s which gave rise to SOAG's long running excavation of a Roman villa complex [at Gatehampton]. Tim has been a supporter and good friend of SOAG ever since.

Paul Smith

retired County
archaeologist for
Oxfordshire



From his appointment as county archaeologist in 1991 until his retirement from the position in 2010 Paul actively supported and encouraged all SOAG activities.

Ian Clarke

former SOAG Chairman
and Secretary



Ian joined SOAG in 1999 and has made major contributions to the Group both administratively and as a project leader. He served as Secretary and then Chairman, during which time his major contribution was to put the organization of SOAG on a more secure footing. Ian also initiated and directed the Brightwell Baldwin Community History and Archaeology Project (BBCHAP), and later the Ascott Park project.

Alan Hall

former Director of
SOAG's HighWood
project



A member of SOAG since 2015 Alan took over leadership of SOAG's High Wood project in 2017. Alan brought to bear his extensive experience in Roman archaeology gained primarily in Surrey and in this role, he developed and led an enthusiastic team, raising standards to a high amateur level with the project culminating in the finding a Romano British temple. This discovery, which is of national importance, raised SOAG's profile and reputation. Alan continues to offer support, advice and encouragement to other SOAG project leaders.

Corporate Memberships

SOAG has been a corporate member of several archaeology organisations most notably the *Oxfordshire Archaeological and History Society (OAHS)*, and the *CBA South Midlands Group*.

But also of note was long-term SOAG membership of the *CIA (The Commission for Independent Archaeology)*. This organisation was set up and chaired for about 40 years by Andrew Selkirk, more famously known as the founder and current President of the leading archaeology magazine in the UK: *Current Archaeology*. The CIA represented the interests of local amateur and community-based archaeology groups such as SOAG. Amongst other things it sponsored the development of a resistivity machine affordable by amateur groups such as SOAG. It was via early membership of this program that SOAG acquired in 2018 its TR Systems Mk 2 resistivity meter – our current device. The organization sadly wound up in 2018.

Outreach

SOAG's mission has always included outreach and community engagement, and this was formalised in our 2009 constitution as our one 'Objective', namely:

"To advance education for public benefit in the study of historical heritage and archaeology and in particular to advance research and education for public benefit in the archaeology and historical heritage of South Oxfordshire and its surrounding area."

Supporting community-led projects

There have been many examples of SOAG playing a role in local community-run history projects, by providing the archaeology skills and resources needed to enhance a local project. Prominent examples of this have included *BBCHAP (2006- 2013)*; the *Blewbury Big Dig Community Project (2012- 2018)* - see above - and more recently the *Chinnor Orchard project. 2020- 2025*.

Encouraging community participation in SOAG projects

We have almost always opened our own fieldwork projects to participation by locals as an opportunity for them to 'learn archaeology' (and for us to grow our membership!) Perhaps this was most successfully demonstrated at the 26-year long *Gatehampton Roman Villa project*, which actively invited participation by locals and other non-members. During the project's lifetime, the participation by non-members was well over a hundred, several of whom had arranged to visit and participate in the project from all over England and in some cases from abroad. (We also know of at least one case where a teenager began his interest in archaeology at the Gatehampton dig and was motivated to later become a professional archaeologist, which he now is.)

Giving lectures

From Day 1 SOAG leaders have given lectures on SOAG projects, and archaeology in general, to outside organisations. Sometime these are to local community groups and other archaeology societies, but more significantly at archaeology and history conferences. These have been too numerous to list but perhaps the most significant has been at *Oxpast* - the annual Oxfordshire Past conference, the leading forum for professionals, academics, and amateurs in the county. We have not missed a year since the conference was started in 1990.

(Photo: Chairman Dave Carless presenting the joint SOAG/Blewbury History society project at Oxpast 2016.)



SOAG Finances

SOAG has always relied almost entirely on membership subscriptions to fund its activities. In its first year (1969) a single membership was two shillings and sixpence. Of course, that has slowly risen with inflation but for the last 15 years it has been steady at £15pa per individual membership. (Often, we used membership fees at neighbouring societies as a benchmark for setting our own subs.)

What we have never had is a significant capital reserve. Until about 2011 this was seldom above £2k, but more recently, due to three endowments (see next para), we built up a reserve of c.£25k but which is currently (2026) standing at about £20k. We have also accumulated in various ways physical

A short history of SOAG

assets of varying value which include enough basic tools to run a dig, and also several valuable items of geophysics kit (see earlier).

The increase in our capital reserves has been due mainly to three endowments:

- The Cynthia Graham Kerr Bequest - £10k. The value of this was actually determined by her son and executor, Alistair: (see his photo, at the beginning of this document as a young man in-an early SOAG dig in 1970.
- The Trio bequest of £1k by at Pat Preece to support Landscape Archaeology research in SOAG.
- The David Cox bequest of £10k, for general use. David was long involved in SOAG, but perhaps best known as the main pot washer at the Gatehampton Roman Villa project for many years.

In respect of its finances, SOAG contrasts with some of our neighbouring societies who are examples of the long standing 'County Societies' – in two local cases of which they have reserves running into several £100ks. They have been 'givers of grants', rather than 'seekers of grants' which is what SOAG largely been.

Funding SOAG projects

Our funding rule for SOAG projects has generally been that SOAG projects must raise their own funds for activities that require resources that SOAG cannot provide centrally. This has been achieved in a number of ways:

Member fees for digging: Increasingly over the years we have been charging members a specific small fee to attend digs (sometimes per visit, and sometimes per season).

Site owner contribution: Sometimes the site owner has contributed funds and other resources to us (recent example has been the Phillimore Estate – the family owners of our Romano-British site at *High Wood*, near Henley-on-Thames).

External Grants: Sometimes we have successfully sought external grants, e.g. variously from the CBA, the Robert Kiln Trust, and at BBCHAP a major grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund. (And once even a local supermarket!)

Project Sponsors: Sometimes the project has had a sponsor who co-initiated the project and has contributed some small funding; one example being the VCH which funded some travel and also the carbon dating at Bix.

Further sources of information

SOAG's physical archives have recently (2026) been deposited in the Oxford History Centre. However, the most valuable of them for research purposes were digitised in the mid-2010s in a project led by Mike Green, part funded by SOAG's Cynthia Graham Kerr Bequest. The resulting digitisations are available on the SOAG website (soagarch.org.uk) along with associated advice on how to access and search them.

The digitised and searchable document series are as follows.

All SOAG Bulletins (1969 – 2025)

These are available as individual documents, and also as an integrated set which enables global searching for specific topics.

All SOAG Messengers (1981 – 2026)

These are available as individual documents or as an integrated set which enables global searching. But note that this set of documents is behind a SOAG password, and is therefore not available to the public. This is because *SOAG Messengers* have historically contained private contact details of SOAG individuals that we do not wish to be widely available.

Cynthis Graham Kerr's archaeology logbooks

These are a meticulous and beautifully handwritten personal recording of almost every day of SOAG's activities from 1969 to 2009. They are in the form of five foolscap bound books (now in the Oxford History Centre). But a digitally transcribed copy of them, minus any graphics, is on the SOAG website and can be searched.

Oxoniensia and CBA South Midlands Journals.

SOAG sometimes recorded its work in the main Oxfordshire archaeology journal, *Oxoniensia*, and also the *CBA South Midlands (SMA) Annual Journal*. *Oxoniensia* is easy to find online and search, but the SMA journals less so. Accordingly, all SOAG entries in both journals have been transcribed by SOAG member Alan Hall into a single document, which is available on the SOAG website. These can provide a gateway to the original reports.

Individual SOAG summary archaeology reports

In truth whilst SOAG has regularly reported annual updates on its work in various documents (see above) it has not been very rigorous about producing final project reports for publication. However, several projects do have final reports in paper form. These have been deposited in the Oxford History Centre and digital copies of them exist on the SOAG website (usually in image rather than text-searchable form).

Any difficulty in accessing any of the documents on the SOAG website should be addressed to the current SOAG webmaster.

Postscript: Anniversary celebrations

And to finish this history on a celebratory note. Every 10th anniversary SOAG has put on a party. For the 50th in 2019 we mounted a special meeting celebrating the past, the present and the future (agenda below.) The event was simultaneously a celebration of the completion of the Gatehampton Roman Villa dig after 26 years on site. The event was featured in a short item in *Current Archaeology* magazine under their regular 'Edible Archaeology' section.

Agenda for SOAG's 50th anniversary celebrations

SOAG's 50TH ANNIVERSARY MEETING

Thursday 28th November 2019 at 7.30pm

A celebration with invited guests covering . . .

The Past . . .

Hazel Williams, and others
'Some scenes from SOAG's past'

Paul Smith

(Retired Oxfordshire County Archaeologist and honorary SOAG member)
'Working with SOAG: 1990-2010'

The Present . . .

Richard Oram
(Current Oxfordshire County Archaeologist)
'How archaeology is organised in Oxfordshire, and some future challenges'

The Future . . .

Ed Peveler and Wendy Morrison
(Project leaders: Chilterns Hillforts Project)
*'The new LiDAR map of the Chilterns and
The launch of a new collaborative project with SOAG'*



This is also the traditional 'end-of-the-year' SOAG social including wine, soft drinks, and small food



at the
Goring Heath Parish Hall,
Whitchurch Hill RG8 7NY
(map on the SOAG website)

From Current Archaeology magazine – April 2020

EDIBLE ARCHAEOLOGY

The South Oxfordshire Archaeological Group (SOAG) had a double celebration in November 2019: our 50th anniversary, and the completion of our long-running excavation of a Roman villa at Gatehampton, near Goring-on-Thames. The celebratory cake featured our late founder Cynthia Graham Kerr, who was famous for digging well into her 80s wearing, whatever the weather, shorts and a white floppy hat. She is watched over here by Jet, one of the many site cats who have been monitoring our work for 26 years.

South Oxfordshire Archaeological Group



'Marzipan Cynthia' was eventually interred at the villa at a backfilling ceremony in late 2020. – just after the first Covid lockdown.

In Memoriam

This 'History of SOAG' has appropriately begun and ended with Cythia Graham Kerr (1929-2011), without whom SOAG would not have existed in the first place, and then survived as long as it has.

About the author: Mike Green

As a result of a chance meeting with former SOAG chairman Mike Fulton, Mike joined SOAG in the spring of 2007 following early retirement from a career in IT. Mike had always had an interest in local history but had no previous experience of field archaeology, and a couple of weeks later he found himself trowel-in-hand at SOAG's main excavation at the time – Gatehampton Roman villa. Mike soon became involved in many of the SOAG field projects running that year and, within a few weeks, was co-opted onto the SOAG committee.



From then until a couple of years ago, Mike had an involvement in most SOAG projects, and was deputy project leader on many. His background in science and IT soon attracted him to their application to archaeology and he quickly became involved in SOAG's geophysics surveys which had only recently become a standard part of most SOAG projects, especially after the acquisition of SOAG's own resistivity equipment.

When Mike joined, several of SOAG's earliest members were still around and he became friends with SOAG's founder Cynthia Graham Kerr, and also with Pat Preece who in the 1970s and 80s established SOAG as a major local force in the field of landscape archaeology, both giving him personal insights into SOAG's earliest days.

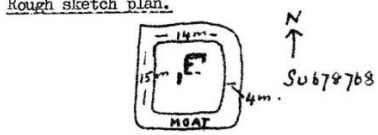
Mike also became involved in SOAG's communications strategy, taking over the running of the SOAG website in 2009, editing of our newsletter, *SOAG Messenger*, from 2009 till 2022 and also helping with the production of our annual journal, *SOAG Bulletin*. Key to preparing this history, Mike also took over maintenance of SOAG's paper archives, and in 2015 managed the digitisation of many of these in order to make them available, mainly, via our website. Mike's contributions to SOAG have been a joint venture with his wife, Nancy Nichols, who for ten years or so personally arranged and managed SOAG's lectures and visits programmes.

Mike has also been involved in local archaeology outside SOAG, being a member at various times of five other local societies, and initiating collaborations with local professional archaeologists and academics. This external involvement has enhanced his understanding of how archaeology in the wider world has worked during SOAG's lifetime.

The responsibilities Mike has taken over the last 19 years have therefore given him particular access to, and understanding of, the details of SOAG's history, which has encouraged him to draft this first version of a history of SOAG.

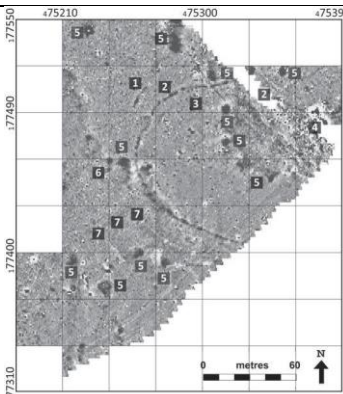
Annex: Table of SOAG Fieldwork Projects

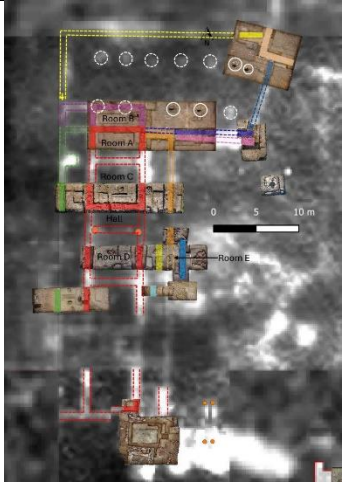
In future editions of this History, it is planned to expand this table of projects into a more complete record of all the notable archaeology projects SOAG has undertaken, especially adding in more of the earlier projects.

Project title, scope, dates and leadership	Initiating or sponsoring organisations, and results	
Lilley Farm (Mapledurham) 1971 - 1973 <i>Project leader.</i> WJ (Bill) Fowler – later chairman of SOAG. In 1970 SOAG was already seeking a site that could serve as a long-term dig. This conjectured medieval moated site was the first of several such digs in our history.	Bill Fowler injected some professionalism into the infant SOAG and at a general meeting in October 1970 he explained in detail <i>“how it must be done and that we must make our mark as a Group by doing one job and doing it properly with a report at the end – or we’d be No Good”!</i> The site turned out not be medieval but mainly of “late 18/early 19 C. construction”. The Lilley Farm dig represents a milestone in SOAG’s history as it was the first dig to be properly recorded and the results published in two reports in the CBA9 newsletter for 1971 and 1972, better known to us now as the CBA’s <i>South Midlands Archaeology journal</i>.	<u>Rough sketch plan.</u>  <i>The Lilley Farm moated site</i>
M40 pre-construction archaeology (near Lewknor) 1972 (May to September) <i>Project leader.</i> (Almost certainly) Peter Fasham of the ‘M40 Research Group’, and leader of the Lewknor section of M40 archaeology.	SOAG members were invited (or, knowing Cynthia, probably invited themselves!) to take part in the digging. A 5-meter wide strip was fully excavated. But note that amateurs such as those from SOAG could not be involved in the same way in a similar national infrastructure project today. E.g. <i>“Amateur and community archaeologists were not permitted to do the actual physical digging on the frontline HS2 sites.”</i> (Source: Dig Ventures website.) This project also led directly to the creation of the main professional archaeology company in our area: Oxford Archaeology.	 <i>M40 under construction near Lewknor</i> (Source: Cynthia’s logbooks)

Project title, scope, dates and leadership	Initiating or sponsoring organisations, and results	
Newington (south of Stadhampton) (1984 – 1987, and again in 2003) <i>Project leader.</i> Cynthia Graham Kerr, (and then others.) First phase was fieldwork and excavations in the environment of Newington House to discover the history of the estate and the wider area. Restarted 15 years later by John Moore Heritage Services (JMHS) triggered by planned local housing development	This was SOAG's main field project for several years in the 1980s and was called simply 'The Dig' (a title adopted later by the Gatehampton Roman Villa project (see below). The Manor was the property of a SOAG member, so in Phase 1 few constraints on the scope and management of the project. The results of SOAG's fieldwork work were fully integrated into the JMHS final report – available now on the ADS and SOAG's website.	 <i>SOAGs in a trench at Newington in 1984</i>
Gatehampton Roman Villa (near Goring-on-Thames) (1993 – 2019) <i>Project Leader:</i> Cynthia Graham Kerr; then, from 2002, Hazel Williams. Discovery and excavation of a Roman Villa. SOAG's 'base project' for 25 years. It was called simply 'The Dig' in its earliest phases.	Spun off from Oxford Archaeology's pre-development work for Thames Water's expansion of its extraction wells near the Thames in the late 1980s. The project became SOAG's longest running (26 years) and, due to the site being fully available to us all year, offered extensive opportunities for the public to visit and participate. It became the public face of SOAG for many years.	 <i>26 years of digging at Gatehampton completed.</i>
BBCHAP (Brightwell Baldwin Community History and Archaeology Project) (2006 to 2013) <i>Project Leader:</i> Ian Clarke (a secretary and then Chairman of SOAG.) Archaeology to discover the history of the parish, the major part of which was researching and excavating the lost (in the 17thC) manor house and locating the adjacent DMV. Also included archaeology at neighbouring sites such as Blooms Field and Cadwell Farm	A local community archaeology project part sponsored by the Heritage Lottery Fund. Project rolled into SOAG and actively supported by the then owner of the current manor house – (who also became the President of the Oxfordshire VCH). The project located and then excavated the original manor house which had burned down in the 17thC, and established that there was an even earlier medieval manor house under that. Heritage lottery funding also enabled SOAG to acquire its first resistivity device - the Geoscan RM15.	 <i>SOAG secretary Ian Clarke and SOAG chairman Dave Oliver using an underground camera at Brightwell Baldwin Medieval manor house.</i>

<i>Project title, scope, dates and leadership</i>	<i>Initiating or sponsoring organisations, and results</i>	
<i>Bix: Search for Lost Medieval Church</i> (2007- 2010) <i>Project Leader:</i> David Nichols The search for a known early medieval church in Bix Bottom (Bix Gibwyn) whose location had been lost.	Project jointly developed by SOAG and the Oxon VCH (Victoria County History) to assist in the VCH updating of its Big Red Books for Oxon. The graveyard was found and 15 skeletons excavated, overlying probable pre-existing Roman mortared foundations. Some funding was provided by VCH for post-ex work, including SOAG's first radiocarbon dating, which determined the age of the skeletons and thereby bounding dates for the churchyard.	 <i>Medieval skeletons excavated by SOAG at the lost Bix Gibwyn medieval church.</i>
<i>Emmer Green Bronze Age rings survey</i> (2013) <i>Project Leader:</i> David Nichols Three types of geophysics survey (magnetometry, resistivity, and GPR), and also our first drone photography, to define what the multiple circular crop marks on Emmer Green Common represent.	Project initiated by BAS who invited SOAG to contribute resources to the survey since it was in SOAG territory. Jointly managed and documented. Confirmed that the crop marks are almost certainly all Bronze Age ring ditches.	 <i>GPR underway by BAS and SOAG with Reading University kit (one BA ring visible in the left background).</i>
<i>Blewbury 'Big Dig'</i> (2012 – 2018) <i>Project leader:</i> Dave Carless (leader of the local history society, and SOAG chairman.) Fieldwork at a number of sites in the village.	This long running local community history project needed archaeology. The project was jointly managed by the Blewbury History Society and SOAG. The most notable discovery was a rare early (5-6th C) Saxon Sunken Featured Building (SFB).	 <i>Excavating the Sunken Featured Building (SFB) at Blewbury.</i>

Project title, scope, dates and leadership	Initiating or sponsoring organisations, and results	
<i>The Lithics of the Chilterns slopes</i> (2009 – 2017) <i>Project Leader:</i> Janet Eastment Mostly field walking on the south (dip) slopes of the Chilterns between Henley and Goring to assess the prehistoric lithics in SOAG's 'territory'.	SOAG member <i>Janet Eastment's</i> PhD project at Winchester University. SOAG supplied resources - geophys and people - with later assistance by Abingdon Archaeology Services (AAS) (Roger Ainslee) who provided additional resistivity survey assistance (for free.) A prominent spinoff of this was the re-surveying of a suspected Neolithic causewayed enclosure near Shiplake.	 <i>Possible Neolithic causewayed enclosure revealed by a joint SOAG/AAS survey at Sonning Eye.</i>
<i>High Wood</i> (near Henley-on-Thames) (2015 - 2022) <i>Project Leaders:</i> David Nichols, and later Alan Hall. Long known Romano-British site 'in the woods above Henley'. Previously researched in the 1970s by the Henley society (HAHG).	Project restarted by SOAG in 2015 with encouragement, both financial and practical, from the landowners, the Phillimore Estate. The project surveyed and excavated the settlement and established that it was also the site of a rare Romano-British Temple	 <i>Drone photo of the excavated temple.</i>
<i>Wyfold Manor</i> (just south of Checkendon) (2019 – 2023) <i>Project Leader:</i> Dave Carless Research into the complex history of the estate from Saxon times to the present. The project embraced geophys, excavation, and also research into the manor's historic place in the wider environment - Landscape Archaeology was a big part of this project.	Piecemeal research had previously been undertaken by former SOAG members over many years. The new owners of the Manor in 2018 invited, and then actively supported, SOAG in undertaking more extensive fieldwork and other research on their property.	 <i>Wyfold Manor.</i>

<i>Project title, scope, dates and leadership</i>	<i>Initiating or sponsoring organisations, and results</i>	
<i>Smokedown Farm</i> (3 miles from Faringdon) (2020 – 2026) <i>Project Leader:</i> Bill Annan A Late Iron Age settlement enclosure overlain by a Roman villa complex which evolved in phases between the late 2nd/early 3rd centuries CE and the end of the 4th century.	SOAG was alerted to this previously unknown Romano-British site by friendly local metal detectorists. A potentially long-running project, although we may have to leave this site earlier than we desire due to possible changes in land usage. An example of a site well outside SOAG's traditional geographical area.	 <i>The complex of Romano British buildings at Smokedown.</i>

Reports on all these and other fieldwork projects can be found in the digital archives on the SOAG website.