

# London Archaeological Societies — 15

## EASTERN HERTFORDSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGICAL GROUP

The East Herts Archaeological Society has, for many years had an active volunteer team of field workers. In 1971 the Society was asked by the Department of the Environment to undertake a major excavation at Puckeridge prior to the construction of the By-Pass. This necessitated full-time working for many months during 1971 and 1972 on the site of Skeleton Green, Puckeridge.

Arising from this and other major excavations at Braughing, Puckeridge, Ware and currently at Foxholes Farm, close to Hertford, a full-time team under the direction of Clive Partridge has been formed by the Society with the close collaboration of Hertford Museum. It is named the Eastern Hertfordshire Archaeological Group.

The Group consists of the professional nucleus plus an active team of experienced volunteers with local organisers who can undertake excavation, field walking and survey work. On major sites work is carried out 7 days a week by both the professional team and the volunteers. Post-excavation work is also carried on on the same basis. The use of this mixed work force has proved very cost effective: for example, the cost of 10 months full-time excavation at Foxholes, Hertford, where 5 acres of gravel were hand stripped and over 300 features were excavated, was under £5,000.

A number of excavations in the Puckeridge/Braughing area have revealed vitally important sites of the Late Pre-Roman Iron Age. The Skeleton Green site provided a prolific and sealed assemblage of pottery and other artefacts of pre-Conquest date, with many imported Continental wares. Some of these finds are new to British sites, others are new in a definite pre-Conquest context. This material is comparable only to the Camulodunum material in its importance to the late Pre-Roman Iron Age of South-East Britain. Other excavations, notably at Griggs Bridge, Braughing 1969-73, and between Puckeridge and Standon in 1975 have revealed evidence of occupation of a similar period. The Skeleton Green site also revealed the earliest known Roman occupation of the Puckeridge/Braughing area, with military and other finds of the Claudian period. Other excavations in the area included a 1st century bath house, cemeteries, and aspects of the Roman town layout.

Another major multi-period site was Foxholes Farm, Hertford, where excavations have continued since 1974. Here an agricultural settlement of the 1st century BC to the 1st century AD was succeeded, after a period of disuse, by 3rd and 4th century industrial and agricultural occupation. The main finds of this late Roman period were over 40 bowl furnaces with associated finds of slag and crucibles, five corn drying ovens and a small cemetery. One of the corn dryers (weighing 20 tons) was lifted for conservation and display in Hertford Museum. There was evidence for post-Roman occupation (normally missing in our area) in two sunken huts and the post holes of two long timber buildings, and possibly two smaller timber buildings. These features contained grass tempered pottery with simple rims and slightly sagging bases.

Evidence for earlier occupation in our area has come from excavations of four Mesolithic sites — one at Stanstead Abbots and three between Broxbourne and Dobbs Weir — ranging from c 7500 to 3000 BC. In addition, four Mesolithic or Neolithic sites have been identified and surveyed in the Cuffley/Northaw area.

Many new Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age sites have been located, mostly on the upland areas to the South of the Lea, between Hertford and Ware, and on the



Bathhouse at Braughing cut by late Roman ditch

upland areas to the North of the Lea, and four have been excavated. The density of Bronze Age and Early Iron Age occupation of this area was considerably greater than had hitherto been supposed.

The excavations have been complemented by programmes of aerial observation — a survey in 1975 revealed about 140 previously unlocated sites — and field-walking, undertaken by the Society in conjunction with the Hertford Field Walking Group and the Bishop's Stortford Historical Society, which has resulted in the location of a number of sites, notably on the Puckeridge By-Pass, the gravel working site at Foxholes Farm, Hertford, and the Hoddesdon/Ware By-Pass.

Work for 1976 will continue on a major extension of the gravel extraction site at Foxholes Farm where field walking has already revealed Bronze Age, early Iron Age and some Roman occupation. It is hoped to undertake a major excavation adjacent to the 1975 excavation at Standon/Puckeridge, which should reveal further evidence of the Iron Age occupation of the Puckeridge area.

Anybody wishing to participate in the Group's activities is welcome and should contact the East Herts Excavation Group, 17 Bull Plain Hertford. The Group now has sufficient storage area for the finds provided by Hertford Museum which also houses the Society's library. The Group has premises at No. 17 Bull Plain, Hertford as an office and processing centre. A new professional service called Eastern Region Archaeological Services has recently been established to undertake contract work for outside bodies, either in Hertfordshire or in the counties immediately adjoining our area. The work which can be undertaken includes archaeological surveying, excavation, pottery and plan drawing. It is hoped, in due course, to add other post excavation services.