

Building on history

Hendon and District Archaeological Society expands activities to reflect changing archaeological arena

As London archaeological societies go, Hendon and District Archaeological Society, is a mere youngster. Formed in 1961 by local enthusiast Themostocles Constantinides, HADAS's first project was an excavation to investigate the Saxon origins of Hendon. The society grew to be one of London's largest and most successful groups, now covering the whole of the borough of Barnet, maintaining a membership of around 200 and organising activities anywhere from local schools to Scotland. Is there a secret to its success?

Barnet may not be first in the ranks of London boroughs renowned for archaeological sites, but it does cover the Brockley Hill Roman kiln site, Watling Street, a moated manor house and Saxon settlements and it has historical resonance related to that decisive Yorkist victory in the War of the Roses, the Battle of Barnet (the site of which in fact lies just north of Barnet in Hertfordshire). The HADAS founding focus on excavation remains, although

now rather diminished since the heyday of the 1960s and '70s. Although the consequences of PPG16 have reduced much amateur involvement in excavations across London, HADAS continues to dig one or more sites without fail every summer. Because the society also owns equipment including dumpy level, resistivity meter, GPS and metal detector, it often lends kit to neighbouring groups, or excavates on their behalf. HADAS has also been invited to undertake projects in neighbouring Brent, which has no archaeological society of its own.

The early days were marked by the contributions in particular of a number of local women with keen interest in archaeology. Daphne Lorimer MBE was the first director of HADAS's long term excavations on the West Heath Mesolithic camp site, and went on to be a leading figure in the excavation of prehistoric Orkney. West Heath was significant not only for its important archaeology – the only such site in that



part of London – but also because it was originally discovered by a HADAS member, Alec Jeakins, and subsequently involved hundreds of members between 1976 and 1981. Among those diggers was June Porges, who describes the period as extremely exciting, with everyone learning new skills every year. Other key members, such as Dorothy Newbury and Bridgid Grafton Green, also made their mark from those first decades.

Other leading lights Ian Robertson and Ted Sammes led early excavations at Church End Farm and Church Terrace in Hendon. Some of those sought-after Saxon remains did emerge in digs in the '70s, as did much else, as large areas around the town centre were explored in advance of development. This resulted in daunting stores of paperwork and artefacts, much of which is only now being examined, analysed, written up and archived.

The first of a new style of excavation reports – *The Last Hendon Farm* – was published last year, the product of a



This page

Top: Because of its experience and equipment, HADAS is often asked to excavate in neighbouring areas, as here at Pinner Golf Course.

Left: HADAS site archives are being systematically standardised and deposited at the LAARC so that they are available to researchers. Here members work on the West Heath mesolithic site.

Next page

Left: Early excavations, such as this one at Church Terrace in 1973, are now being analysed and researched for publication by HADAS members on a Birkbeck post excavation course.

Right: Long weekend outings take members from Scotland to, as here, the Eden project in Cornwall.



Birkbeck College course on post-excavation analysis taught by local resident and MoLAS pottery specialist Jacqui Pearce. The students, all HADAS members, investigated and wrote up different aspects of digs at Church End Farm in the 1960s, analysing the site history, phasing of the buildings, occupation evidence, artefacts and animal bones. The book recently won a commendation at the biennial British Archaeological Awards, and was short-listed for the SCOLA/London Archaeologist publication prize in 2006. Next in line for publication is the site at Church Terrace, excavated in the 1970s, again using the Birkbeck post-ex course as a springboard. HADAS is especially fortunate in attracting legacies from members: these will enable the society to continue to produce good quality books with both a high standard of analysis and wide appeal.

Another academic collaboration, with UCL Institute of Archaeology under the Widening Participation programme, fuels some of the summer excavation work, such as that in Brent. Years 7, 8 and 9 in local schools get involved in excavations, sometimes in their own grounds. A WWII air raid shelter recently brought history closer to the young diggers both through the artefacts they unearthed and through visits by some of those who had used the shelters over 60 years ago (see page 237). Another dig this summer on the site of Tudor geographer John Norden's home has potential to bring alive the significance of mapping in history and today.

Other summer activities take the form of training digs for members. HADAS members, like those of many other societies, still enjoy site visits and

outings in the summer, one of which is normally over a long weekend. The winter lecture series is popular – especially when it features Romans – and covers Barnet history as well as archaeology worldwide. A number of HADAS members are involved in the Battle of Barnet Working Group, which collects and collates information about the battle with support from the Battlefields Trust.

Every Sunday, year round, HADAS members process the archives in their headquarters in Avenue House, a Victorian Hendon landmark. The aim is to bring every piece of evidence up to an archivable standard so it can all be handed over to the LAARC. The premises also houses the society's archaeological lending library of some 3000 volumes, many donated by members or left to the society as a legacy.

The HADAS website and lively online discussion group gets thousands of hits a year from people worldwide tracing ancestors. The resurgence in interest in genealogy and consequently in social history means that the society deals with countless queries on Victorian businesses, or Georgian street patterns.

For all its activity, gaining new members is as much an issue for HADAS as for other London societies. There's no magic bullet: sporadic advertising, newsletters, annual open days and the wide variety of activities are all part of the plan to keep new blood coming in. In the past the occasional *cause célèbre* has served to spark major new interest in archaeology. But with no big threats to archaeology looming, current chairman, Don Cooper, believes that links with other organisations across

London – such as UCL, Birkbeck, the LAARC and London Archaeologist – are the means to broaden activities and appeal. A HADAS member with experience of societies across London is Peter Pickering. He too feels that local societies need to get a broader regional outlook through bodies like the CBA, SCOLA or LAMAS, particularly where, as in Barnet, the local borough is an artificial, rather than historical, entity.

A big research project – perhaps even in a neighbouring area – that could involve members in a range of activities is an idea being mooted. Participation in this or other projects by professional archaeologists who live in the area would be welcome, and could help bridge the gap between paid practitioners and amateurs. Peter Pickering feels that a few more serious archaeologists – including those with qualifications from Birkbeck or the Institute – becoming active in local societies would strengthen skills, knowledge and interest enormously and help maintain members' involvement after the initial attraction.

So if there are lessons from HADAS's success, the first seems to be that variety, imagination and plenty of good ideas from every possible source can help. Excavation, field walking or other archaeological activities still seem essential to remaining close to the subject and attracting new members, but a society of any size needs to work constantly to understand what might interest the public. And finally, broad links can be crucial not just in keeping up to date with all that is happening in London, but also in bringing in extra resources, attention and activity.

~~ HADAS members Don Cooper, Peter Pickering and June Porges talked to Becky Wallower.