



WARG

1972-2012

WARG History - Part 1

The Early Days

As the major digs of the Winchester Excavations Committee came to a close, Winchester City Council appointed a full-time Rescue Archaeologist and, at the instigation of Martin Biddle, a Winchester Archaeological Rescue Group (WARG) was created.

Why rescue archaeology

It is only relatively recently that archaeological remains have been offered any protection when a site is being developed – for a building, a road or whatever. Before the current regime, unless it was a scheduled monument, if a developer didn't want to bother with archaeology, they could destroy the record with impunity. And even here in Winchester there were developments that did just that: for example the Friary site in St Cross Road was badly damaged in the 1960s, with the full extent of the damage only discovered in 2008/9.

However, some developers were prepared to allow "rescue archaeology" – a dig, usually limited in time, before the development began. There were two movements in the early 1970s that tried to capitalise on this: rescue archaeologists appointed by local authorities and rescue groups, amateurs who got together to carry out the digs, process the finds and write up the results.

A chocolate factory

Winchester appointed a rescue archaeologist, Dr Peter Wade-Martins, in March 1972. But he had no support – initially not even an office. WARG's role, at least initially, was to be the entire support system for rescue archaeology. A disused chocolate factory in Little Minster Street (previously a temperance billiard hall) was the headquarters and WARG volunteers had to rewire, redecorate and even find ways of heating the building, before the Rescue Archaeologist could move in. The building provided a photographic dark room, an area for finds processing (pot-washing), meeting space, office for the rescue archaeologist and even served as a make-shift dormitory for diggers on rescue sites, both volunteers and those who were on very small salaries. The initial membership form emphasised that the group needed active participants and gave a list of the skills that were thought useful, including flying (with access to a plane) computer programming and machinery maintenance. (WARG now has a member who is a pilot with access to a plane.)

The first meeting of the group was on 31st of July 1972 and it agreed that as well as supporting the archaeology, there would be a newsletter and a programme of lectures, discussions and visits. In fact the first visit was to Danebury, on 23rd of August, followed just over three weeks later (17th September) by a visit to the Saxon village excavation at Chalton. The talks programme started on Monday 4th September, and ran each month through to February. And there was even a special extra-mural course created by the University of Southampton of "10 lectures and 5 field events". Subscriptions were set at 50p (students and under 18s 20p). And by 1974 another WARG tradition, a Christmas party in early January, was also established.

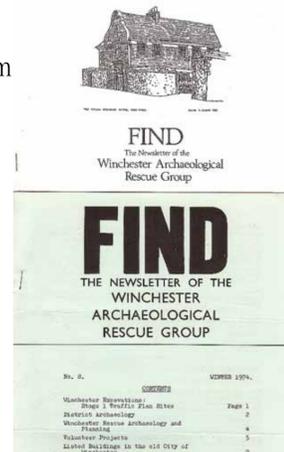
Digging and processing

The small group of dedicated WARG members spent weekends and evenings digging on rescue sites. Over the next 15 years there were over 200 reports in Find, the WARG newsletter, ranging from the long programme at Victoria Road (which ran from 1972 to 1976) to short sampling exercises, field-walking and even a graveyard survey. While most of the activities were in the historic city, the remit extended into the new district formed in the local government reform of 1974.

Once objects had been excavated they had to be processed (pot-washing) and catalogued. From the start there were working parties carrying out processing every Monday and Wednesday. Other projects undertaken included animal bone studies, environmental studies, detailed cataloguing (the catalogue cards produced at this stage are still being loaded into a computer database), finds conservation, a samian ware study, a building survey and a range of other projects through the years.

Communication

Archaeology is not just digging and processing: as important is recording and communicating the results. From the beginning WARG produced a newsletter. This covered a wide range of things, from detailed archaeological reports, through to reports of visits and even an occasional crossword. Producing a newsletter, in the days of Roneo machines which seemed determined to put ink everywhere but in the right place, could be a saga in itself. But communication went beyond that, and included open days for the public at the offices, exhibitions, public lectures, regular reports of meetings supplied to the Hampshire Chronicle, and even taking part in the St Giles Fair dressed as Romans. There was a strong social element: the bonds created by trowelling or pot-washing were extended to the Christmas party, a summer barbeque and the occasional beer and skittles evening.



A newsletter has been published since the first year



St Giles Fair in 1974. This was a regular feature in Winchester but interest died down in the late 1970s.

WINCHESTER RESEARCH UNIT
in collaboration with
THE CITY OF WINCHESTER

FORMATION OF RESCUE ARCHAEOLOGY VOLUNTEER GROUP

Dr. Peter Wade-Martins takes up his post as Rescue Archaeologist on 1 March 1972. He will be carrying out rescue excavations in advance of development projects and will be arranging for the observation and record of all disturbances of the ground in the ancient city and suburbs.

Financial resources are extremely limited and Peter Wade-Martins will need to form an effective and energetic group of local volunteers to work with him on every aspect of pre-excavation survey, excavation and recording, and the post-excavation study of finds and publication.

If you are interested in taking an active part in any aspect of this work, and in helping to form a group which will be the only means of recording much of the city's buried remains before destruction, will you please fill in the form below and return it to me as soon as possible?

13 Parchment Street, Winchester, Tel: 5183. Martin Biddle, 28 February, 1972.

WINCHESTER RESCUE ARCHAEOLOGY GROUP

I am interested in taking an active part as a member of this voluntary group

NAME..... Age (if under 21).....
ADDRESS..... TELEPHONE.....
..... Home.....
..... Office.....

Please tick any of the following fields in which you have professional or amateur experience:

Surveying	Laboratory work	Filing
Cartography	Botany	Copy typing
Graphics & design	Geology	Store-keeping
Technical drawing	Metallurgy	Electrical wiring
Architectural drawing	Zoology	Machine maintenance
Quantity Surveying	Computer programmer	Decorating
Photography	Punch card operator	Carpentry and joinery
Scientific photography	Secretarial work	Sign writing
Flying (with access to plane)		

Any other special skill or knowledge of possible relevance.....

Have you any previous archaeological experience.....

It is not necessary to have any special skill or experience to join. The ability to take an active part is all that is needed. But we do want to find out at once what special skills there are in the group, so that we get the best possible results from our work

The first membership form - with a wide list of skills that were thought likely to be useful.

RESCUE ARCHAEOLOGY IN WINCHESTER

An exhibition at the City Museum, Winchester

Feb. 2nd - May 31st 1974

Open from 10am on weekdays
Sundays 2-4.30pm



Results of recent excavations at Hyde Abbey, Victoria Road & Colebrook Street

WARG was always keen to share its findings with a wider public.

<p>Winchester Archaeological Rescue Group</p> <p>Dame Kathleen Kenyon will lecture on Digging up Jerusalem on THURSDAY 20TH NOVEMBER 7 P.M. in 1975 PILGRIM'S HALL, The Close, Winchester IN THE CHAIR The Bishop of Winchester OPEN TO ALL Silver Collection</p>	<p>Winchester Archaeological Rescue Group</p> <p>Joan du Plat Taylor F.S.A. will lecture with slides on The Mary Rose and Other Wrecks on TUESDAY 27TH APRIL 7.30P.M. in 1976 PILGRIM'S HALL The Close, Winchester IN THE CHAIR Martin Biddle, M.A., F.S.A. OPEN TO ALL Silver Collection</p>
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Public lectures covered a far wider range of subjects than just Winchester's archaeology.