

WARG 1972-2012

WARG History - Part 2 1980s - early 2000s

The 1980s and 1990s were times of change for archaeology in Britain and Winchester. There was recognition that much valuable information was being lost and in 1990 the government issued PPG 16 – guidelines that gave local authorities the powers to require developers to carry out archaeological investigations before building.

Growth of professional archaeology

From a single archaeologist supported by amateurs, Winchester developed a strong professional team of archaeologists, based in Hyde House with a display area, meeting room, a dedicated “pot shed” for processing and ample storage. A part of the team was a group of field archaeologists, who carried out digs for the City and, later, on a commercial basis for developers.



Hyde House - an illustration used for the WARG Newsletter cover for many years

The City took over responsibility for publishing the newsletter in 1988, with WARG material as a section within the newsletter and later as an insert.

Community archaeology

The archaeology team ran a series of community archaeology projects. The best known of these was at Hyde Abbey, where for five years, between 1995-1999, a series of digs culminated in finding the probable site of the graves of King Alfred, his Queen, Ealhswith, and his son, Edward, whose bodies had been moved there from the New Minister. Other projects included Wickham and Oram’s Arbour. Many WARG members took part in these digs as individuals.



Hyde Abbey Gardens - with slabs marking the site of the graves of King Alfred, his wife and his son

The Brooks

In 1987/8 a large area in the centre of Winchester was excavated before a major shopping centre was built. It found evidence of occupation from Roman times, with significant medieval material, including large merchants houses. One of the largest city centre excavations in Britain, it still only dug a quarter of the site, with the archaeology on the rest of the site being totally destroyed to build the underground car park. The site had public



WARG members pop up everywhere: long term WARG member Don Bryan emerges at the Brooks

viewing areas and attracted large numbers of visitors. Many WARG members were active in both the digging and the finds processing, a lot of which was carried out on site.

PPG 16

In 1990 the government issued PPG16 (Planning Policy Guideline 16). This was a welcome recognition of the importance of archaeology, and gave local authorities the power to require developers to carry out archaeological investigations. These could range from desk research, through a watching brief, where an archaeologist visited the site during work that might have an impact on archaeology, to a full blown excavation. Planning permission could even be refused if a development was going to severely damage archaeology.

This meant that there was a growth of professional archaeology organisations, ranging from small one person companies to large organisations, like Wessex and Oxford Archaeology, geared up to work within the timescales and budgets of the developers. Some university archaeology departments also set up companies to market internal expertise and some local authorities (such as Chichester) spun off their archaeology teams into commercial firms.



WARG members clearing the crypt of Winchester Cathedral

Cuts

While in the 1970s and 1980s Winchester City Council was very supportive of archaeology, in the changing climate of the 21st century things changed. The City made the field unit redundant in 2004, and encouraged senior archaeology staff to take early retirement. The community archaeology programme was discontinued and the dedicated facilities in Hyde were later closed.

WARG changes

Over this period WARG’s role became less central. While members took part in digs and in finds processing, it was as individuals, and the events programme was one of just talks and visits.

In 2004/5 the committee of WARG took a long hard look at the future and, while maintaining the name, decided to widen its remit to history and extended the lecture programme to reflect this. With the decrease in resources by the City unit, WARG re-started working parties in the artefact archive. It undertook finds processing for commercial digs and, with support from Dick Whinney, then of the City’s staff, began a programme of field walking. In 2006 it resumed active archaeology, with the excavation of a Roman site, and then in 2007 began a four year project at St Cross, followed by the current programme at St Elizabeth’s College.



The Brooks excavation, in 1987/8, was one of the biggest urban archaeological projects at the time. This shows some of the excavations, which occupied a quarter of the final site for the shopping centre. All this now only exists as records as the archaeology was dug out to create the car parking.



This scene of finds processing could be of any date from the middle of the 20th century until today. It was the processing site on the Brooks in 1987.