

2. The Welwyn Archaeological Society 1960–1998: a personal history

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2.1. Introduction

Archaeologists have long been interested in the history of their own subject. Glyn Daniel's *One Hundred and Fifty Years of Archaeology* (1976) is a classic of the genre and more recently, volumes discussing *Great Excavations* (Schofield 2011) or *Great Archaeologists* (Bahn 2008) have been published. Biographies and autobiographies are not uncommon (*e.g.*, Sir Mortimer's Wheeler's memoir *Still Digging* and Jacquetta Hawkes' biography of him, *Adventurer in Archaeology*; Wheeler 1955, Hawkes 1981). Organisations also have their celebratory histories, such as *Building on the Past* (Vyner 1994) published to celebrate 150 years of the Royal Archaeological Institute or *Visions of Antiquity* (Pearce 2007), which marked 300 years of the Society of Antiquaries of London. Smaller societies, such as the East Herts Archaeological Society (Perman 1998) or the St Albans and Hertfordshire Architectural and Archaeological Society (Moody 1999), have also published histories. More recently, oral history has become an extremely popular method of research (*e.g.*, Perks and Thomson 1998) and this, combined with the continued growth of the internet as a means of publication, has led to the development of the *Personal Histories Project* (Smith 2011).

In parallel with this has been an increasing interest in putting the people back into archaeology (Hamilton, *pers. comm.*). Nineteenth-century reports were often personal and diary-like, whereas the sterilised, emotion-free reports that developed as part of the systemisation of excavation recording in the 60s and 70s, lack any of the wonder or excitement of discovery. Both the Leskernick Project (Bender *et al.* 1997) and Boxgrove (Pitts and Roberts 1998) have tried to redress the balance, and Everill (2008) has examined the life and work of commercial field staff.

Merle Rook and I originally discussed writing a history of the Welwyn Archaeological Society back in 2009, when I took over the directorship of the Society from her husband, Tony Rook. One problem we faced is that the Society has never kept a log of its activities, although there is an archive of newspaper cuttings as well as reports, finds and photographs. The only continuous history was contained within Merle's personal diaries (Colour Plate 2.1). Merle spent many hours copying relevant extracts from her journals for the history, a project she was working on when she passed away in 2012. The result is a stack of seventeen notebooks nine inches high!

'The history' of the Society is still a work-in-progress, but Merle's abstracts inspired the telling of a more 'personal history'. In reality, it is three personal histories: principally Merle's, which is inevitably entwined with Tony's, but also at times mine. I joined the Society in December 1975 at the age of 11, and first appear in the diary when I excavated at Chapel Wood on the 25 April 1976 as 'another boy...'

As pleasurable as trips down memory lane are, this paper has a deeper purpose. Small archaeological societies such as WAS are not uncommon. Many of them started in the early 1960s, for example the Chess Valley Archaeological and Historical Society and the North Herts Archaeological Society, as well as WAS, were all started in 1960. Selkirk (2014) sees the 1960s and 1970s as 'the golden age of archaeology' because of this rise of local societies. He bemoans, however, the fact that many have become 'lectures-and-outings societies.' Hertfordshire was particularly rich in active local societies in the 60s and 70s, to the extent that the annual conference of the now defunct Hertfordshire Archaeological Council managed to fill a whole day with reports on fieldwork projects. Some of those societies, such as the Hatfield and District Archaeological Society, no longer exist. What, then, makes a local group like WAS prosper? What are the ingredients for a successful 'community heritage group', to use the current jargon? What lessons can we learn from the history of a small group?

In the remainder of this paper I am going to examine a number of themes through the entries in Merle's notebooks with the aim of addressing these questions in the final section.

2.2. The origins of the Society

The Welwyn Archaeological Society, known originally as the Lockleys Archaeological Society, was less founded than came into being. As a result, placing a date on its creation is difficult. The date most often used is 1960, the year in which Tony and Merle Rook moved to Hertfordshire, although other dates are possible, for example 1964 (when the Society became affiliated with the CBA) or 1965 (when it finally gained a constitution in order to open a bank account so that a reward cheque could be cashed; Rook 1971)! At first —archaeologically at least — life was quiet.

9 May 1960

Cycled to Chequers site to look for Roman pottery. Nothing special.

14 May 1960

Looked at earthworks at Digswell. Nothing.

At this time, however, Merle and Tony began building contacts with others involved in the archaeology of the county.

28 May 1960

St Albans again. 2.30 lecture by Dr Ilid Antony on Pre-Roman and Roman Countryside in Hertfordshire. She introduced us to Branch Johnson who invited us to visit him the next evening.

Ilid Antony was at that time the Curator of Verulamium Museum and Director of Excavations for SAHAAS before moving to South Wales to take up a post there. W. Branch Johnson was a notable scholar and author of several books on the county including *The Industrial Archaeology of Hertfordshire* (1970).

The Rooks continued to explore, keeping an eye on construction at the new Welwyn bypass:

16 July 1960

To new by-pass to look for 'bits.' No luck.

Then finds started to turn-up:

26 July 1960

Tony found remains of Roman hypocaust [corn drier].

30 July 1960

Tony to the by-pass at 10.0. A number of diggers turned up to help.

31 July 1960

Off again to by-pass at 10.0. A few pieces of pottery.

1 August 1960

Dig again. Tony and Peter MacT[aggart] made a plan, watched by Branch. Spent the evening washing pottery.

The finds were sufficient to warrant an article in the local paper — the Welwyn Times and Hatfield Herald — on the 5 August 1960 entitled 'Roman villa?' (reproduced in Rook 2002: 23), and a fuller article in the Herts Advertiser and St Albans Times on the 12 August. The site was published as part of the report on the Bathhouse (Rook 1983–6: 105–6). More importantly, it drew attention to the archaeology of the area and a group of volunteer diggers began to form. The key find came later in the year:

30 October 1960

Dressed in boots and anoraks, up to lab for wood which Tony sawed and then down to the Mimram where he paddled. He found more pieces of tile on the further bank so I crossed the bridge to help dig out some pieces of pottery, watched by a little girl. In the evening, after washing, drying and gluing Tony produced a quarter of a large dimpled pot.

These were the first finds from what is now known as the Dicket Mead Roman villa (Rook 1983–6). April of the following year saw excavations in ‘the policeman’s garden’ but in June permission was granted to excavate trial trenches at Lockleys / Dicket Mead¹:

10 June 1961

... Also called on Mr Godsmark at Lockleys and got permission to dig a hole.

15 June 1961

Tony stayed out late digging at Lockleys, Grids 1 and 3.

21 June 1961

Tony brought home a bone pin and a large heavy coin with Britannia on it — profile of a bearded emperor facing right.

28 June 1961

There are ten grids — I, III, V, VB, VI, VII, VIII, IX and X. Large flints and tiles wedged together, particularly in VB and only 3 coins so far and sherds of pottery. ‘Rather a puzzle.’ Helped with barrow for a bit. Peter took photo of VB. Looks like a path.

1 July 1961

Collected ‘Archaeology from the Earth’ from the library. Spent about 5 hours on the dig. Peter watched Tony paddling. Keith Hornett traced Tony and the barrow and did some digging. John Lee looked in briefly in the evening. Then we visited Branch and met Reg Reed and a boy called Adrian and had drinks at the White Horse (noisy and raucous, records and singing). Pleasant to sit out on the grass in the late evening.

For the remainder of 1961, the team concentrated their efforts on Dicket Mead. Meanwhile, Tony continued to keep an eye on the development in Welwyn Garden City.

18 February 1962

Tony and Peter to new housing estate and returned with bag full of Belgic pottery.

4 March 1962

Picked up some Belgic pottery near Blytheway. Tony gave a talk with several slides to follow at Lockleys. Dined with Head and wife. Tea later with some of staff. Icy roads and snow.

The ‘new housing estate’ site is now known as Crookhams (Rook 1968a) and was excavated on and off during 1962. In April 1962, the team returned to Dicket Mead,

but they also helped out elsewhere, for example working with Miss Irene Traill in Stevenage during June and July.²

6 August 1962

Exhibition in Lockleys. Painted 'Welwyn Archaeological Group' to put along the mantelpiece.

This is the first mention of a name for the informal group that had coalesced around Tony and Merle. What Merle fails to mention is that at this point she was over eight months pregnant!

5 September 1962

Wheeled pram (and baby) to Lockleys, had tea with Mrs Godsmark and looked at the exhibition. Tony, Keith and Andy at DM in evening.

During the winter of 1962/3, much work was undertaken on the assemblage of late Iron Age grog-tempered pottery from Crookhams. Site visits continued:

10 March 1963

Tony cycled to Crookhams in the morning and entertained Mr Moodey [from the EHAS], a young coin collector and a woman from the Record Office.

Despite the long winter —it snowed again on April 11 — work at Dicket Mead resumed in the spring of 1963. Tony, who had been working as a building technologist, was offered the post of Science Master for Sherrardswood School on May 7. By the end of the year, Tony's position in the school was beginning to be felt:

3 December 1963

Tony went to Dicket Mead and four boys got permission to help him instead of doing cross-country.

In 1964, however, the pace of work at Crookhams stepped up, with site visits taking place regularly from mid-February through to the end of June 1964:

19 April 1964

John Moss [Eccardt], five helpers and Julian came to dig. It rained. Also Hertford enthusiast with three children called to see pots. We stuck some fine grey decorated ware together.

25 April 1964

Tony cycled to join new digger at 11.0 and home at 3.30 to ask Graham for help in transporting pottery. All drove to Crookhams with Mary, Christopher and Kate and Tony photographed his oven-kiln, a fine site, or sight!

18 May 1964

Crookhams — Tony, Julian, and Mr and Mrs Golesworthy. Julian drove us to look and Mrs G. had dug up a delightful little straining pot, whole apart from a broken base where the hole was. Tony bought it home to wash and Mrs G. took the rest.

29 May 1964

Sylvia born in the study.

21 June 1964

Jim and Barbara Golesworthy took Tony to Crookhams. Jim returned at 6.30 and took us all to see the flint-lined stokehole / furnace Tony found on the other side of the kiln. A perfect bronze brooch and some fine pieces of Samian turned up today. Barbara found the brooch. Tony was hoping to find the base of the Samian bowl. The grey flint-lined furnace was 4' x 4'. The brooch looks quite modern despite the greenish tinge. Tony delighted.

1 July 1964

No more digging at Crookhams unless the mechanical diggers turn up something when the sewers are dug.

At the completion of Crookhams, work resumed at Dicket Mead through the summer of 1964. One innovation was an attempt at some early geophysics:

24 August 1964

Tony made his proton-magnetometer, went out into the middle of the cricket pitch and got the Home Service broadcasting 'Lark in the Clear Air.'

In 1965, the first of the LAS/WAS winter lectures was held:

17 January 1965

Tony gave his first archaeological talk in the pavilion [of Sherrardswood School] — alternate Fridays. He had about 20 children, the Golesworthys and two of the Holder-Vales, John and Edwin. Made coffees.

The winter lecture season continues to this day and is still held on alternate Fridays accompanied by tea and coffee!

In March, an exciting find came to light:

29 March 1965

Disturbing letter from Gordon Moodey... about a pottery find between Welwyn and Panshanger. It was accompanied by a sketch of an amphora... It was written by a man called Mr Robertson in Stevenage. He had seen the amphora in the garage of a Gas Board employee called Mr Day who'd dug it up while laying pipes in a new estate not far from WGC High School.

2 April 1965

In evening Jim called and he and Tony drove to Stevenage to meet Mr Robertson. He gave them coffee and directions to find Mr Day. They found two amphorae in his garage which he wanted for his garden, to grow plants in — or he might sell it for £10. They returned puzzled at what to do.

3 April 1965

They decided to photograph the pot and other pieces and Tony rang Gordon Davis. 8.30am Jim phoned and... arranged to look at the site suggested in a rough map drawn by Mr Day... 10.30 Tony and the Golesworthys off to find the site. 11.0 Mr Cheer arrived to photograph our robin's nest in a kettle, stayed for coffee and talked about moles. He writes the nature page in the Welwyn Times. 11.30 T and G's returned from site with bits of pot picked up from edge of new road. All the trenches had been filled in. Refreshments. 3.0 Golesworthys and Gordon arrived simultaneously. All piled in Jim's car, leaving boys with me, and off to Mr Day who remembered 'other bits of pottery on the other side of the road.' They returned to the site. 5.0pm Party returned with more pottery and $\frac{2}{3}$ of a silver cup, rather crumpled — the same period as the Welwyn burial ones c. AD 50. It has little decorative borders and weighs 6 oz. Also the bottom of an amphora. Tony contacted the police because of Treasure Trove and coroner's inquest and an inspector arrived during supper, took a statement and insisted that Tony should come out to the site. He phoned Gordon Moodey later in the evening. The silver bowl was taken by the Inspector.

This site is now known as the 'Welwyn Garden City Chieftain burial' (Stead 1967) and is on display in the British Museum. Over the next few days, phone calls and meetings were had with the Development Corporation, the British Museum and other interested parties, and a metal detector was borrowed to help locate finds. The Ministry of Works initially offered the Society a grant of £100 to excavate the site, but this plan soon fell through:

7 April 1965

Ilid called with a Mr Stead and they looked at the maps and went on to the site.

9 April 1965

After breakfast Tony rang Mr MacKay [from the MPBW] who was out. Ian Stead told him that the excavation was his and he was starting next Monday with 12 diggers. Tony rang Gordon and Ilid (who'd gone on holiday), asking him who was in charge. Gordon rang, after 20 minutes discussion with Stead, and Stead rang to arrange a meeting for tomorrow.

10 April 1965

At 2.0 Mr and Mrs Stead and a bearded lecturer from Leicester arrived. Provided tea and they left with Tony for the site.

12 April 1965

Tony cycled to Panshanger at 2.0 but no diggers till 3.0 when the huts arrived. He surveyed a new road and returned before a terrific storm. All the scale plans, site records and aerial photos and contour maps now taken by Stead, without any discussion. Mr Day refused to relinquish his amphorae or to say who worked with him. Now he's the Min. of Works problem.

The Ministry of Works excavation lasted from the 12 to the 23 of April when Ian Stead had to attend a rescue excavation in Prae Wood, St Albans. Luckily they had a 'fibreglass transparent cover':

19 April 1965

Rain, hail, snow and strong winds. Gordon Moodey arranged to come in the afternoon so Tony was able to have a brief glimpse of part of the excavated grave at Panshanger. Several pots and a dish there.

Excluded from the burial site, the Society turned its attention to other projects. Later that year excavations continued at Dicket Mead, but also on a Roman well in the centre of Welwyn (Rook 1968b) and further work on Late Iron Age sites in Panshanger, Welwyn Garden City during which:

13 August 1965

Tony on front page of Welwyn Times after finding a safe in a chalk pit.

A further article appeared on the 20 August which stated that 'A local man walking by a pit in a field near Hern's Lane, WGC, at the weekend found an opened safe and a number of cheques lying about... WGC police were called and safe and cheques were taken away in a Black Maria for examination...'

The importance of this event for the Society is that a reward was given for the find, and in order to cash the cheque the Society needed to open a bank account, which required a constitution (Rook 1971). The Society was, at last, formally born:

24 September 1965

AGM of Lockleys Archaeological Society 8.0–9.45. A new lady from Tunbridge Wells, now in Ayot St Peter, v. enthusiastic. Provided coffee. 1½lb biscuits, 4 pints milk, 30 spoonfuls of coffee and about ¾ packet of Demerara sugar did nicely —milk diluted by half.

2.3. Fieldwork

Fieldwork, and especially rescue excavation, played a major role in the formation of the Society. Commercial archaeology has taken away the 'rescue' element, but fieldwork remains part of the life of the Society. I have decided to concentrate on just one site, known as Great Humphreys from the field name (HHER 6280, 6309, 6312, 6313, 9983). This site lies in the countryside between Datchworth and Watton at Stone, where the Society has worked since the early 70s. Sites investigated in this area included a medieval chapel in Chapel Wood (HHER 1987), a Roman cremation cemetery in Lower Rivers Field (HHER 6590) and most recently the Broom Hall Farm site (HHER 12898; Lockyear, this volume). Interest in Great Humphreys began in 1979:

13 May 1979

Met Mr and Mrs Wallace and Diana for coffee. He's found a crumpled Iron Age mirror, damaged by ploughing. S [Tony] had a look at the site...

14 May 1979

Tony to the British Museum with Mr Wallace's mirror. It's thought to be worth as much as £4000. He did some phoning in the evening as Mrs W thought the land it was found on belonged to Mr Clark but it in fact belongs to Mr Jeffries.

16 May 1979

Tony cycled to see Mr Jeffries to persuade him to give the mirror to the BM. He had a flat tyre so had to be driven back! Mr J. said he would.

Although at this stage sadly missing its handle, the Aston Mirror is one of a small number of Iron Age bronze mirrors known and a significant find (HHER 6313; Rook *et al.* 1982). Nothing much could happen at the site until later in the year when the crop came off at which point the search for the handle could begin in earnest.

30 August 1979

Kate struggled with her history essay but left it at last to come out for a walk round THE field. Tony was pleased to meet Mr Clark the farmer by chance.

3 September 1979

Tony phoned Ian Stead and arranged to go to Ashwell to collect the magnetometer so after lunch we went. 40 miles including delivery to the farm.

6 September 1979

Tony and Richard [Balley] tired after all the cycling to Datchworth. They found some big horseshoes today.

Eventually surface finds of Roman pottery at the highest point in the field led to some test trenches being excavated (HHER 6309).

23 September 1979

Kris rang at 10.0 to ask for a lift so left Sylvia behind when we set off for Datchworth. Returned for them at 4.20. It was drizzling. It took ages for them to pack up. Richard located [with the metal detector] and Kate found two coins. Tony used the metal detector to find two lovely sheep bells – crotals (or maybe harness bells?).

30 September 1979

Did BH [bath house] duty... Left Sylvia to lock up and rushed back to collect Tony, Kate, Richard and Kris Lockyear from Datchworth plus surveying equipment and bucketful of pottery.

Excavation continued every Sunday for the next few weeks.

16 October 1979

Because there's to be a rail strike tomorrow, Tony arranged to meet Ashwell train at Welwyn North about 5.40, deliver the magnetometer to Ian Stead and receive two copies of the Iron Age mirror [made by the BM for the finders]. The copy is really splendid. Wish we had one.

21 October 1979

The ditch at Great Humphreys is down over 10 feet now. Tony brought home some hefty Iron Age pottery from it.

The trenches were put to bed for the winter and Sundays were taken up with winter walks. In the spring of 1980, the digging season opened with an opportunity to section part of the ditch in Well Wood.

9 March 1980

Kris played with his school band [in church] and came home for lunch – corned beef sandwiches. Diggers off after lunch. Collected them at 5.0. Kris caught his bus about 6.0 carrying the great silver tuba and a crash helmet!

At the end of April, work resumed at Great Humphreys with the original 1m wide test trenches extended to enable a good-sized portion of the ditch to be excavated.

4 May 1980

Very windy at the dig. Chilly, too. Went late and didn't stay long. They're sieving the soil for a change.

11 May 1980

Took Tony, Kris and Richard to Datchworth. They were sitting in the sun in our garden. Mike found a bronze cockerel, beautifully modelled. John and Tony photographed it and Richard took it home. All came back for tea. Kris and Sylvia did four minutes recording for the Newspaper for the Blind.

The cockerel was published (Rook and Henig 1981) and is now in the British Museum. The excavation continued, mostly on Sundays through the spring and summer (Colour plate 2.2). Once the crop was harvested, the search for the missing mirror handle continued using a metal detector.

19 September 1980

Tony off with Jack Parker again and returned triumphant with the handle of the Iron Age mirror! Richard and Kris came to wash pottery. Richard returned to Baldock by train.

21 September 1980

Back from church to find Alec had taken Tony and Kate to the dig but Kris and friend had arrived later by bike so had to drive there anyway. Went to sleep for a bit but had to drive out there again as Tony wanted his camera, as he'd found something. Two pots and a pile of bones. A crowd of people came to look so Tony was fairly cagey.

22 September 1980

Tony excavated with Val Rigby most of the day. She took the pots and the handle back to the British Museum. Tony is soaking the cremated bones in the kitchen.

26 September 1980

Richard and Kris came and sorted the 'princess's' bones and Tony found a bear's claw. He rang Ian Stead's wife. She's a palaeopathologist and is going to examine them.

The excavation was put to bed for the winter and resumed the following spring.

31 May 1981

Drove to the dig at 4.15 and sat and listened to the skylarks and a cuckoo. Field a mass of bobbing yellow flowers...

By the summer we were through the Roman layers and into what seemed to be a sterile chalky fill when:

5 August 1981

Tony went digging with Jack and Diana Smith. Returned in evening to photography two babies skeletons.

30 August 1981

Hurried home from church to go digging with Tony... It was a beautiful day. Richard found another baby and we took up the bones of all of them after measuring up.

There were at least thirteen baby skeletons in the ditch fill. Great Humphreys had some other surprises:

18 October 1981

Took Tony to deliver the mirror to the farmer. He then had a class to take field-walking. They found Bronze Age pottery and a bronze pin which somebody snapped in half thinking it was plastic! He and four others returned for tea.

11 November 1981

Tony to London and delighted with reception of Bronze Age finds at B.M.

The finds included a Bronze Age chisel (Lockyear 1987: Fig. 3, see also this volume, Fig. 1.2) but Merle's diary does not record the circumstances of the find. Worked resumed in the spring of 1982.

2 May 1982

... The ditch is narrowing rapidly. An unusual animal skull turned up and an 'Ali Baba' rim.

30 May 1982

Jack called for Tony at 11.30. We went to look at the ditch later. It's 10 feet from the grass to the bottom. Peter was washing pigs' skulls and stripy pottery.

31 May 1982

Took Kate to the station and Tony and Kris to the dig. Collected them and Richard at 4.30. They reached the bottom of the ditch and cleaned it up for a photograph.

6 June 1982

Took Tony to the dig... The ditch looks very smart and tidy, though not yet finished... All back for drinks.

Having finished the first section of the ditch, a second length was opened up that autumn.

5 September 1982

Took Tony to the dig — exactly 5½ miles. Returned at 3.0 when there was a sudden downpour. He had taken off some ploughsoil by then. In the morning

the stubble was still burning and my feet got black. Spoke briefly to Bill Jeffries [the farmer] who was watching.

They also took the opportunity to return to the Bronze Age site (HHER 6312):

19 September 1982

Tony to dig with Jack as I was making coffee for church. They dug up lots of thick Bronze Age pottery.

The season started late in 1983, as the Society conducted what we would now call 'an archaeological evaluation' at Parkside, Welwyn, which found nothing of archaeological interest.

12 June 1983

Took Tony and Bill to Datchworth [i.e., Great Humphreys]... took sewing to the site and sat in the sun while Tony, Bill and Richard forked out the 'fill' of the ditch and Mike trowelled. He found a lovely coin of Constantine.

The latter part of 1983 was taken up with more evaluation work on the route of the Watton-at-Stone by-pass, particularly plotting coin finds made by metal detectorists. We were able, however, to do some more in the autumn.

23 October 1983

We drove to the dig leaving Kate on her own. Walked around the field and then I spent the rest of the time picking up baby bones and putting them in a plastic bag. Joined by Richard, Mike and later Tony [...]. Delightful walk at lunchtime towards the coppice. Mike stayed behind and dozed. Bluest of skies, high con-trails from planes and rooks flying. All back for tea and we showed Tony2 [Lane] photos of the ditch as he wasn't there last summer.

27 November 1983

Out for a walk with Tony, Mike and Tony2. Heavy mud. The canopy over the dig had come apart so helped undo the ropes etc. and Mike climbed the ladder to put it back together. He also folded the plastic and carted it off, muttering that it was what his navy training had been for.

The winter of 1983–4 saw WAS battling with cold and mud to excavate the Roman road side settlement at Watton-at-Stone, which was going to be destroyed by the new by-pass. Work resumed at Great Humphreys at the end of April:

29 April 1984

Drove to the by-pass along the rough roadway and loaded the car with buckets, the barrow and plastic sheeting. Also brought back part of a Roman grindstone. Richard and Jack came too and fetched other objects and we drove across the paddock at the Homestead and deposited our loads in the

hut. By then it was 1.0. Time for our picnic. Then we uncovered the site and tidied it and spent the rest of the day digging (after a short walk to the pond to see the newts diving). Bluebells and primroses out. Much coppicing done beyond the pond. Kris came back for a cuppa.

17 June 1984

Off to the dig with Tony and Lewis. As we reached the stables, a terrific storm. Sheltered in the barn and talked to Mr Aylott and eventually located Jack in the hut. Soon Kris, Mike and Richard appeared. We put the canopy over the dig and excavated through lightning and thunder. The worst bit was taking off the canopy because of all the mud. Did a bit of baling with the shovel, a bit like 'It's a Knock-out'. Kris and Lewis came for tea and we looked at pots, Tony's little ones and my bits of clay.

15 July 1984

Up in the field by 11.45. No girls this time. Kris late. He'd fallen off his bike and had a hole in his trousers and a bloody knee. Richard came without Mike who wasn't well. Jack there first. We baled out and later had to put the covers over to keep off a cloudburst. Hailstones in Welwyn. Then sky cleared and it was hot. Covers eventually removed about 4.0. Shifted about a foot of soil, very friable and nothing in it.

26 August 1984

A hazy summer day of unexpected heat and beauty. As usual to the dig and took Lewis who enjoyed himself in a quiet sort of way. Tony and Richard spread out the covers and eventually shortened one and spread it over the frame after we'd moved it along. I mostly trowelled and used a pick as the ground was so hard. Found a massive piece of rim.

2 September 1984

Tony, Richard and Jack spent the day cutting two slots near the fence to locate the ditch while Lewis and I trowelled very slowly across our patch and got hardly anywhere — no finds worth seeing. The field has been burnt off and ploughed. The polythene sheet flapped loudly till we rolled it up. When we got back home Kris had arrived so we had a long chat till nearly 6.30 when Lewis went for his bus.

In the autumn and the most of the following year the Society worked on the ring ditch at Ladylowe, followed by an excavation in the Grange in Welwyn, only returning to Great Humphreys in the autumn. I had also decided to do my undergraduate dissertation on the site (Lockyear 1987) and that winter enlisted the help of my fellow WAS members:

22 December 1985

Took Tony's present to the Wallace's and met all three by their bungalow before rejoining Richard and Mike and attracting Kris's attention by throwing stones at the hut. Spent the afternoon walking parallel across Great Humphreys, picking up sherds and putting them in plastic bags. Mike went home and we returned for tea.

29 December 1985

... enjoyed hurling stones through ice in a drainage ditch. Almost impossible to pick up anything as the ground was frozen hard. Kris worked on alone. Richard gave him and his bike a lift back here and we ate Christmas cake and drank tea.

1 January 1986

Met Richard for another field-walk, picking up pottery sherds and putting them in labelled plastic bags. It was cold and fairly dark when we left Great Humphreys and rain began while we were at home having tea.

3 January 1986

Kris called and drew small finds.

5 January 1986

Out with Lewis and Tony at 2.0. Very cold in the field and we stuck it for only an hour to Kris's dismay. He and Richard went early to measure it out and came back late.

12 January 1986

In the afternoon, Lewis called and we met Kris, Richard and Mike up at the site and made three separate journeys across the field with our plastic bags. Kris was very pleased and grateful.

Work on the site itself resumed in May.

15 June 1986

A perfect day — warm, breezy and a blue, blue sky. Tony anxious to be off as soon as I returned from church (confirmation service; read lesson). Richard and Mike arrived to collect the ladders, my lunch was packed, I changed into a new white broderie anglaise blouse and we were off. A peaceful hour before lunch — good Emmental cheese sandwiches — and then walked to the pond where we saw a demoiselle fly and through the wood to look for purple orchids. They were nearly over. Lewis arrived as we returned, then a couple with three sons from Datchworth, a girl from Ware and then Bill. So quite a crowd. I left off trowelling and marked Milton essays instead. We trundled

gently home at 5.30 and drank beer in the garden so spent rest of evening a bit hazy.

27 June 1986

Kris turned up before leaving for Devon. He brought us some aerial photographs with splendid Roman road on one, at Datchworth.

The photograph was from the RCAHM(E) collection then held in Fortress House that I had visited as part of my dissertation research. I had missed the road when I found the photograph, but thought I could see a ring ditch!

As part of my dissertation I undertook some resistance surveys at the site.

7 August 1986

Fetched Kris and took him and the 'instrument' to Datchworth after supper.

10 August 1986

Dug all afternoon, lots of finds and exercise... Kris stayed for supper... He and Tony sorted more pottery and he cycled off into a thunderstorm with only a rear light.

12 October 1986

Cloudy and cooler... Kris arrived soon after I got back and we had lunch at Great Humphreys. Mike arrived while Tony was preparing to cook the bratwurst... Finished reading 'Brat Farrar' in the hut with the door closed, and then wrote down Kris's readings on the resistivity meter.

2 November 1986

Home from church about 11.45 and straight out to Great Humphreys. Richard and Mike there before us. Stayed for toasted sandwiches and baked apples which Tony kept warm in newspaper. Kris was very tired still and his repeated survey was no better than the first one.

9 November 1986

At about 11.15, Tony and I to join Kris, Mike and Richard at Great Humphreys and measured out a grid to walk up and down in. The wind was buffeting us about... All lunched in... [the hut] — a tight fit with the drying frame in the way. Then walked up and down in my square and Tony's till it was time to take Kate to her rehearsal at the Barn Theatre... Kris was very tired, too...

4 January 1987

I joined Kris, Richard and Mike and we collected pottery till Kris had finished his square and then we walked to Chapel Wood and back... All very wet, muddy and windswept.

30 January 1987

WAS lecture by Kris Lockyear [on the Gubbio Project]. He phoned at 6.30. He handed his dissertation in at 1.0pm and caught the next train [from Durham]. He's only had six hours' sleep in the last three days so was a bit wound up. Richard drove him home.

Excavations at Great Humphreys resumed once more in April taking place, as usual, most Sundays.

7 June 1987

New digger — Jenny [Searle]. We arrived before Richard and Mike and put up the covers as the weather was grey, cloudy and windy. Worked hard all day... Found a collection of little tacks, probably from an old sandal. All back for tea, exhausted.

12 July 1987

Lewis and Jenny arrived at exactly 11.0 and Kris just as we were leaving. Lewis found a curious collection of bones. They could have been in a bag. I found more pottery and swapped with Mike who found none, and then when he was dozing returned and found more. Jenny and I left the others to look for Kris's peg and crept down to the pond where Richard and Mike were silently watching a moorhen and four chicks. Back for beer and orange juice in the garden.

11 October 1987

The sun shone and it was much warmer so Tony and the gang — Richard, Andrew and Jenny — went digging. Mike joined them at 3.0 and hit the first baby. Tony found a superb coin of Vespasian AD 69.

Having put the site safely to bed for winter, digging there was suspended although other work took place at Hill Farm and in Welwyn. Work at Great Humphreys started again the following April,

24 April 1988

A glorious day after a chilly night. Not a cloud in the sky all day. Off to the dig with Andrew and Tony for 11.50... Nothing much found... Primroses just finishing; violets in bloom; bluebells just coming out. John Wallace has planted a grove of cherry trees.

29 May 1988

Out to dig at 11.30, just us, Jenny, and Andrew. Ate lunch down the hole as the wind was chill and the clouds threatening. Then it rained so we covered the site and sat in the hut while Tony made Andrew a kite from a blue plastic sack and the handle of the fishing net.

12 June 1988

A beautiful, beautiful day. Sat by the pond before breakfast and smelled the pinks and watched the newts. Blue sky all day. To dig with Tony and Andrew. Richard later. A wild wind which ruffled the barley so it flowed round us. My arms are stippled with red dots after walking through it. Richard's shoulders went pink so put some sun lotion on them. Tony said I was an 'interesting mangle' which confused Andrew!

19 June 1988

Didn't go to the dig until nearly midday when Kris finally arrived... Jenny came, too. It was very hot. Went beetroot in the afternoon so lay in the barley and listened to the long-tailed tits and some animal grunting in the hedge. Saw a blue butterfly and a Burnet moth. A new foal was standing gangly next to its mother. Eventually, Andrew and I washed pottery which was pleasant. We finished it all. Tony found the remains of two Belgic pots and lots of bones. Andrew was thrilled. Shandy on the lawn afterwards, orange juice for Jenny and Richard had tea.

10 July 1988

... Richard... found two babies so all delighted...

17 July 1988

... Spent digging time on the baby — a very fiddly job. Its fingers and toes kept shifting in the soil. Tony did the other one which was much disturbed. Its arm seemed to be above its head. Tony photographed them both...

24 July 1988

A good day at the dig. I took up both babies and found some super Belgic pottery on the lower level...

7 August 1988

... Richard found another baby which he allowed Jenny to tidy up...

16 October 1988

Jenny couldn't come out today because of visitors so she missed the tidying and photographing of the site. Andrew, Lewis, Richard and I tidied the bottom and sides again and Tony did some shovelling and pulled up buckets... we ended up shifting all the buckets, bags, old tyres etc. for the photographs. Joan and Mike came to watch and Joan took photos and so did I. Richard and Lewis lashed together the two ladders against the sieving frame and Tony climbed to the top and so did I. Gorgeous view. All back for tea...

13 November 1988

Did plenty of picking and shovelling and emptying of buckets at the dig. Much earth-moving revealed the bend in the ditch — quite remarkable that it should be exactly where we left a division between two separate excavations... Rick turned up with his metal detector and found two Roman nails!

In 1989 the Society, as well as finishing off the sections of ditch from the previous seasons, began to excavate in the paddock next to Great Humphreys in the hopes of revealing structures associated with the late Roman material that had been dumped into the top of the Iron Age ditch.

4 June 1989

By 11.0 Jenny, Lewis, and a girl called Belinda who's researching snails arrived and we all went to the dig... Very blustery at times and some heavy showers and hot sunshine. My transparent umbrella proved a blessing and then the spokes came through the plastic and it gave up the ghost. Belinda collected about 10 bags of soil plus molluscs and we helped carry them back. Then she drew a section of the ditch. My hands are sore from pulling up buckets of earth. The two sections of the ditch have now been joined. Jenny and Lewis eventually met at the bottom. Lewis found a fine piece of Belgic storage jar and Mike found a minute bronze coin in the patch in the paddock!

Once the crop came off we were able to bring in a JCB to fill in the ditch, but also to excavate test trenches through the plough soil to trace the line of the Iron Age enclosure.

In 1990, the excavation season was occupied with work at Hawbush Close in Welwyn. Work in 'the Paddock' next to Great Humphreys resumed at the end of March 1991 and continued through the summer:

7 July 1991

Very hot all day. Left for dig at 11.15. The girls, Julie Chalk and Katherine Stevens came too. Brian-number-4 turned up and Frank brought a party of Belgians at 4.0. Bill came for an hour. Spent all day washing pottery, Bill and Tony helped. All sat in the garden and drank shandy afterwards, except for Jenny who had tea. The girls took her home.

11 August 1991

Out to dig with Tony and Jenny. Cleared away burnt patch after general brushing down. Tony photographed the surface... Went off to see the Battle of Shiloh at Knebworth House in the afternoon... About 850 participants and very exciting cannons.

By the end of the summer the focus of attention had shifted to 'Oaks Cross Farm', the Hooks Cross Roman villa site. Other sites were tackled, including the Queen Victoria Memorial Hospital site in Welwyn and the fish ponds at Digswell (Rook 1994). It is unclear from Merle's diaries when the excavation at Great Humphreys was filled in. The Society returned to the site in 1997 to trace the line of the ditch in the paddock which lies to the west of Great Humphreys (*WASNews*, Summer and Christmas 1997). To this day, however, our two abandoned huts still stand on the edge of the paddock, slowly disappearing into the hedgerow.

2.4. Lectures, outings, parties and other things

As noted above, the first LAS/WAS lecture took place in January 1965. We have had ten or twelve lectures a year since then, usually held fortnightly between October and April. The talks are both varied in topic and vary in presenters, ranging from 'member's evenings' to lectures by well-known archaeologists. The following is a small sample:

25 October 1968

LAS lecture on Roman Roads by Eddy Parrott. Late. He had a puncture... some pretty pictures of countryside around Rickmansworth. Sociable crowd. About 30 coffees.

16 February 1972

LAS lecture by Gareth Davis. Lots of slides of Bronze Age spears and some gold clasps and rings. Rushed over to FineFare as forgot biscuits.

October 22 1976

WAS lecture by [J.B.] Ward-Perkins [then Honorary President of the Society]. Very successful and an enormous crowd packed the lecture theatre with people sitting on the window sills and standing at the back. He told us about the trials of setting up the Pompeii 79 Exhibition which is due to open at the Royal Academy next month. He actually went out to select the exhibits himself, with one assistant, and it took three months to get the Italians moving. Rome said they'd be delighted to help if Naples would be responsible, and Naples said they'd be charmed as long as Rome gave permission. He is a very amusing speaker.

21 January 1983

WAS Member's evening. Five talks. Kris's very long and Mike Petterson was rather crowded out.

12 October 1984

WAS lecture on Wroxeter by Kate Pretty. She's in charge of the finds which are many and varied. Eric Balley stayed for a chat, and Liz Simmons and all the old ones like the Redhouses, Mr Keatley and the Holder-Vales, and both Rogers. Sold over 20 coffees and teas and B helped.

16 February 1996.

WAS lecture interesting — bits about the holes dug by St Albans Field Officer, a pleasant young man called Simon West.

6 February 1998

WAS lecture by Jonathan Hunn. A leisurely stroll through boring landscapes in Lincolnshire and Stevenage. Also saw a ditch recently sectioned at Stanborough School full of Belgic pottery.³

Coach outings have also been a feature of WAS activities. Many of Merle's extracts are quite summary although a few give a little more colour. They started in a modest way, but became more elaborate as time passed.

17 September 1967

Outing to Olney and Chellington. Eight cars. We went with Mr Nash. No Golesworthys — Barbara said she didn't feel too good.

7 April 1979

WAS outing to Avebury and Stonehenge, with pick-ups in Potters Bar and Wembley. Soon it began to rain. Avebury was mud. Couldn't reach West Kennett long barrow as the river had flooded. Stonehenge looked colourful despite icy, slanting rain. Old Sarum, however, was dry and breezy.

24 October 1987

WAS outing to Singleton Open-Air museum. Beautiful October sunshine. All went spinningly till Kris suggested detour to Compton Church. Here we found both delight (two-storey Norman chancel) and disaster. A fallen cedar had just missed the tower and the coach had a flat tyre. Enjoyed watching Mike on point duty and Richard and co struggling successfully with wheel nuts. At Haselmere Museum we were given coffee, loos, an art exhibition and a guided tour.

Lunched at the Open Air Museum and wandered vaguely among the old houses and, with Andrew, looked at horses ploughing and a threshing machine hurling chaff in the air. On to Petworth House, lots of statues and a very up-market wedding.

29 April 1995

WAS outing to Chartwell and Knole. 45 passengers and 14 weren't National Trust. Collected £7.50 from each — £4.50 Chartwell and £3.00 Knole. Grey skies and rather cold. Coffee with Bryan and Jenny. Tea with Brian and Gillian. Australians chilled.

The annual Christmas parties were originally held in a variety of venues in the area, but since January 1976 they have been held in Tony and Merle's beautiful 15 century home in Welwyn.

30 November 1968

LAS dig dinner at the Cowper Arms. Derek drove us there, with Tony's mother, and we walked home. Very pleasant.

4 December 1970

LAS dig dinner — a real Christmassy one. Alec not well enough to come. A smaller turn-out, about 20. Home by 10.15. Service slow and a bit expensive, £2 per head incl. wine.

13 December 1974

WAS party at North Star. Tony arranged some 'guess the picture' questions and Alec and Derek some slides to 'guess the place'. 25 people altogether. Ollie wore his silver Duke of Edinburgh award and Richard looked elegant in a narrow-waisted suit. Guy and Andrew came too...

24 January 1976

WAS Christmas party — at home. Sylvia collected French sticks from Algars and Tony made a magnificent coleslaw. Kate made mince pies which all went. Cut price cake, cheese, biscuits etc. from Welwyn Stores as well, and we made trifles. In all, spent £16 on food and £2 on paper plates and mugs. We had three large flagons of wine and borrowed glasses from the shop. Cider, too. Our 29 guests paid £1 a head. Quite a sedate affair with 'guess the adverts' and 'scrambled villages' competitions. By 11.15 the last had left — Derek with his record player. He said we could easily have had ten more people! The house looked very pretty in the snow. Tony took a photo.

12 December 1981

WAS party. Sylvia put up decorations and Kate did some and made 1½ batches of mince pies. So did I as some of hers burnt while we ate lunch. It took over an hour for Tony to carve the turkeys. He also 'starred' the tomatoes. We hoovered and put the Z-bed in the study. Kate wore a side plait, her new mini-skirt and gold boots. Sylvia wore trousers and a purple shirt. She did masses of serving out. Everyone except Richard had left by midnight.

Jack and Edna couldn't come. Icy night so Richard slept — intermittently — in the living-room. We forgot to stop the clock so the chimes woke him.

There were various other celebrations, some held in the bath house, some in Tony and Merle's garden:

5 November 1987

WAS fireworks celebration. Joan arrived first with a Black Forest gâteau. Then Frank with a big bottle of wine, Bill with a small bottle of red, Mike with a box of fireworks, Richard ditto and later Jenny with some splendid individual ones from Shoplands. Just as we stopped to eat, Andrew and Mum arrived. She returned over an hour later for the second instalment and then we all had cocoa. Andrew was marginally more interested in roasting a turnip than watching the fireworks but he'd been to Lockley's first anyway.

In addition to strictly WAS activities, Tony and Merle were involved in a wide variety of other archaeological initiatives. For example, they edited and produced the *Hertfordshire Archaeological Review* between 1970 and 1975. They also organised the Hertfordshire Archaeological Council's annual conference for many years:

18 March 1972

HAC Conference at College of Further Education. Everyone pleased with the organization. Kept busy — made coffee for 45 helpers before it started, collected 75 dinner tickets from people who'd ordered food as they went into the refectory and made about 300 cups of tea in the afternoon. Sheila and her daughter helped. Bought 7lb biscuits from Welwyn Stores and the children set them out on big plates. We actually had some left over. Daphne sat at the entrance with tickets and publications. Collected 3 figurines from home and sold them all. Lots of tidying up later.

2.5. Conclusions

What can we conclude from this brief history of the Society, what makes a small group like this 'tick'? From the above, one can be forgiven for suggesting the answer is 'tea'!

Firstly, it is clear that one key ingredient is leadership from a dedicated individual who can, and is willing, to spend a significant amount of time running excavations, leading walks, organising trips, writing reports and so forth. Larger societies, such as SAHAAS, have developed various smaller 'special interest groups' that, I presume, are again led by an individual with time and motivation. In the beginning of the Society, it was Tony and Merle's dedication that recorded so many sites in the area.

As Thompson says (this volume): 'Where were the Tony Rooks of Stevenage and Hemel Hempstead, when those New Towns were being built?'

Secondly, the range of activities attract members with varied interests. Many do just want 'lectures and outings' as Selkirk states, but many are also attracted to excavation and fieldwork. Modern excavation, however, is an expensive business. Specialists in a commercial world are no longer able to write reports for free. Academics are by necessity driven by the need to obtain grants, the larger the better. In recent years, however, 'public outreach' and 'community engagement' have become increasingly important within the academic sector, creating opportunities for collaborations between archaeological societies and the universities (see Dhanjal *et al.* this volume). Unfortunately, the number of individuals willing to help dig far exceeds those willing to help with post-excavation. This, inevitably, leads to our 'dedicated individual' having to take on this, as well as all the other tasks.

The last factor, and I believe the most important one, brings us back to tea. The key element is a sense of *community*. Not the big-society, politically driven meaning of the word 'community', but the smaller scale almost intimate meaning of the word. What keeps a society like WAS going is the sharing of interests in a group that develops friendships beyond the task at hand. Tony and Merle's seemingly unending willingness to make tea (or shandys), created a group around them with a sense of shared purpose and a high degree of camaraderie. Over the fifty-plus years of the Society, the members of that group came and went, but that core still persists.

But what of the future? Local societies of all types, not just archaeological, are declining in membership. I was fascinated to observe that many of the concerns discussed at recent WAS committee meetings were also discussed at the 2014 AGM of the East Herts Archaeological Society: how to attract younger members, the viability of outings and so on. Perhaps the growth of online fora and discussion groups as well as 'social media' is providing a way for busy individuals to be part of a virtual group, negating the need for traditional clubs and societies? Can we still run activities that will attract and keep members? There are challenging times ahead.

I hope that Merle would approve of the use I have made of her diary. Working through it has been, for me, both fascinating and emotional. I hope, however, that some sense of the life of the Society has come through the extracts I have chosen: the excitement of new finds, the tension at times of emergency, the fun of the parties and coach outings. I am sure she would approve of my dedicating this paper to all the members of WAS, past and present, in thanks for their efforts and their friendship.

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¹ Lockleys was a minor stately home outside Welwyn, which became Sherrardswood School in 1950. A Roman villa was excavated in its grounds in 1937 by J.B. Ward Perkins and is normally known as the Lockleys Villa. Dicket Mead, the name of the field, was adopted for the villa excavated by LAS/WAS to differentiate the two.

² See HHER 455.

³ Now see Hunn (2009).