

The New Educational Officer

**BACAS
Educational
Officer Tavis
Walker reports
on his first year
in the job**

Tavis Walker

What is your Role and what do you think of it, the school visits and the Upper Row Farm visits and what activities are taking place and what are you trying to achieve..?'

This time last year I was forwarded a Job Description with a one line message saying 'this job sounds like you' I had drifted away from the archaeological arena having turned to secondary comprehensive teaching after working for a number of firms, predominantly Oxford Archaeology, so I was surprised to see that it had come from the BAJR website. I had never lost my enthusiasm for archaeology and heritage and I find teaching immensely rewarding and fun, so to see a post advertised that offered the opportunity to combine both of these aspects was fantastic. With it being the creation of a new project for BACAS it has been brilliant and exciting to have the scope to develop and try new ideas and to meet and work with so many different people all of whom have added immensely to the project. In a year a lot has been achieved and it is just starting to properly dawn on me what else could be achieved if things carry on the same way. I see my role mainly as a teacher who provides heritage and archaeological based educational opportunities for the community so essentially outreach work. But along with going into schools and talking to interest groups there has been the opportunity to develop many other aspects.

My initial view to get the project up and running was to target primary schools in the area and then move on to secondary, post 16 and then adult groups. There has obviously been some overlap as opportunities have presented themselves. Primary schools were targeted first for a number of reasons: firstly, there are a vast number of primary schools in the area, feeding into a few major secondary schools. Secondly, in the national curriculum at the moment there is a focus on the Romans at Key Stage 2 and 3 which bridges the gap between primary and secondary. As a Society we have a fantastic resource to support this: Upper Row Farm and Blacklands (this is of course thanks to Jess' continued proactive support) and thirdly pupils of that age have an incredible inspirational energy when given the opportunity to participate in hands on activities. Many of the schools lack hands on props so learning about the Romans often ends up being from books taught by a non-specialist and if they are lucky a trip to the Roman Baths thrown in.

So a number of stock educational activities were developed around some of the archaeological material BACAS has, so it could be taken into schools and delivered as a standard educational session for up to 35 pupils at a time lasting half a school day. As a follow up to this session a return visit to Upper Row Farm has been offered with a day of archaeological activities which cover a range of skills across a number of subjects in the National Curriculum.

The in school activities include constructing a time line from scratch with a number of pictures, words and artefacts. The concept of time is discussed and the Romans are put into their historical place in time rather than left floating as an individual era of study with no idea of what went before or after. Then there is an enquiry task where the pupils in groups are given a number of containers holding a selection of Roman artefacts from Blacklands. These include bones, ceramics, building material, and other bits and pieces. They have to use these objects to build up a picture of what was going on in the past in the area. The wear on sheeps teeth is used as an example to illustrate that sheep must have been kept for wool as well as meat. Older sheep kept year after year for their wool had worn teeth from chomping grass; whilst some sheep must have been killed young for meat, so their teeth have not worn down at all. It gets the pupils analysing objects really closely and gets them thinking and discussing what each thing can tell them, letting them build up a picture about what life was like at that time in that area.

On site activities include getting pupils to use coordinates and keys to map finds, found during field walking, planning the villa foundations accurately using a tape baseline, hands on experience of geophysics, wattle and daubing the walls of the roundhouse, searching the spoil heap and a

selection of other activities which are run down at the museum barn mimicking post excavation techniques. The sessions have been a great success with very positive feedback from all participants. This has been largely due to the active support of the Society's members in these sessions.

A few little gems from these sessions that stand out include the concerned pupil who wondered out loud how the tooth fairy would have dealt with the mammoth tooth she was holding, or the pupil who asked me what things were like when I was young – I felt my joints seize up and grey hair then and there sprout from my head! Or the pupil who correctly informed me the picture of the car I was using on the PowerPoint to illustrate the present, was in fact from the past because it was from 1994 - how did she know this? - her mum drives one! Or the twist I got myself into trying to explain C14 dating to the brightest 8 year olds I have ever had the pleasure to meet or seeing the horror on parents' and bus drivers' faces collecting the hoards of muddy youngsters from Upper Row Farm after a day's session in the fields...

In addition to these standard stock sessions a number of other sessions have been developed and delivered. The main one has been the consortium of local primary schools' Gifted and Talented pupils, to do a sequence of sessions down at Upper Row Farm covering all the stages of an Archaeological Project from research through to surveying, to excavation, to planning and post excavation and writing up. A number of other sessions are in the making including developing a set of activities for the post 16 pupils at City of Bath College to tie into their 'How Science Works Module'. Having enjoyed all these sessions the highlight of the year for me was seeing the culmination of many members' input in making the Iron Age open day such a great success despite being held on a freezing cold and wet day in November.

Future thoughts on the development of the BACAS Education Project are limitless. Interestingly BACAS' drive to start an educational programme could not have come at a better time with the CBA pushing an educational campaign which ties in with the government's drive to support its recent manifesto outlining the importance of 'Education outside the classroom' which will play a big part in the planned restructuring of the National Curriculum. BACAS and its educational programme will be positioned well and ready to offer a great service as this is developed.

As a previous geography teacher I am in full support of education outside the classroom and think the role that archaeology could play in this is huge. I think that it would be good to work more closely with the CBA in the future on this and make BACAS' programme a model for others to follow. As part of the Masters in Education I am completing at the University of Bath I hope that some of the research carried out on BACAS' Education Project will be useful and could possibly feed in at some point to the work that the CBA is carrying out in the field of education.

In addition to continuing to carry out the visits to schools and groups and down to the farm, this year a number of other projects are planned. BACAS is investigating submitting an application to start our own Young Archaeologists Club. We are well placed and resourced to run a really good club. Also as many of you are aware I am very keen to build a round house up on the Blacklands site. Experimental archaeology is a fantastic way of engaging all age groups in heritage as was shown by the Iron Age open day. There are numerous activities that could be carried out at Blacklands. My vision for the project would be to have the facilities and resources down at Upper Row Farm to make it a hub (visitors centre) for the community for heritage learning. A full size well built round house on Blacklands with wheel chair access would be the centre piece to which all manner of other activities and projects could be run from. As a Society we possess such a wealth of skills and innovation within our membership and have such great support from Jess at Upper Row Farm that there is no reason why over time this could not be achieved.

If you have any ideas for areas the education programme could expand into, groups of people who may benefit from the services offered, ideas for projects, schools to contact or whether you would like to get involved in some way with the project please do not hesitate to get in touch.

And lastly a MASSIVE sincere thankyou to everyone who has got involved with the project. It is not only appreciated by me but by over 1000 people we have directly engaged in the project so far.