



NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER 2020

Letter from the Editor

Hello!

We have exciting news regarding the September lecture – we are trailing a recorded Zoom lecture with our very own Claire Hooper and Lee Joyce. Details on how to access it will follow in an email nearer the time.

Vicky has been busy on WEAGs behalf, firstly by creating an Amazon Smile account which enables you to donate for free every time you make a purchase, click the image below or go to smile.amazon.co.uk and choose West Essex Archaeology Group as your chosen charity.

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Secondly, Vicky has found that the CBA (Council for British Archaeology) has made all their publications available for free – Please follow this link

<https://new.archaeologyuk.org/books-and-publications>

September Lecture

Remember to look out for the email containing a link to access the recorded lecture. Following the lecture, any questions you may have for the speakers please email weagmembership@outlook.com and they will be answered in the next newsletter.

Articles

This month we are pleased to include an article by Colin Mann on **'Dunbar's Number'** plus Part 3 of Lee's trilogy article on the **'M11'**. Do you have anything to contribute to the newsletter? However big or small we would welcome your input – please do get in touch via lexie.lyons@icloud.com.

WEAG Member Profile

Would you like to be 'our profile on a member'? If so email me on and I'll forward you the questions.

Stay In Touch

[weag.org.uk](https://www.weag.org.uk)

[Facebook.com/westessexarchaeological](https://www.facebook.com/westessexarchaeological)

[Twitter.com/WEAGarchaeology](https://twitter.com/WEAGarchaeology)

[Instagram.com/weag_archaeology](https://www.instagram.com/weag_archaeology)

Anything you'd like to contribute to the WEAG Newsletter or if you have any comments on the new format, please email lexie.lyons@icloud.com

DUNBAR'S NUMBER

submitted by Colin Mann

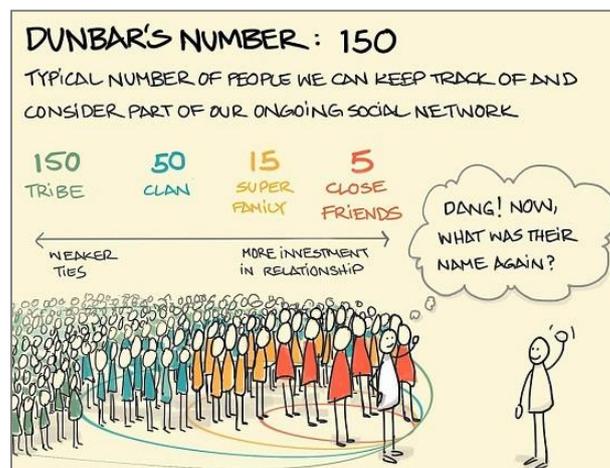
Robin Dunbar is a British anthropologist and evolutionary psychologist and a specialist in primate behaviour at Oxford University. He is particularly well-known for proposing the idea of “Dunbar’s number”, based upon research into primate behaviour.

Primates are highly social animals, who spend most of their time with a social group. Primatologists have noted that for each primate species, there seems to be a maximum size for a social group of members of that species. Research has shown that this maximum group size seems to be related to the average size of the brains of members of that species. Those primate species with larger brains are able to form larger social groups. Researchers assume that a larger brain is needed to be able to hold and process information about all the other members of an individual’s social group. The relationship seems to be formulaic, so knowing the brain size of a particular primate species will give a fairly accurate prediction of the maximum size of a social group of that species.

“What’s this got to do with archaeology?” I hear you ask.

Dunbar pointed out that human beings are primates, and we spend most of our time in social groups. He pointed out that the average human brain size could be used to predict the maximum size of a human social group, based upon the formulaic relationship for other primates. He came up with the number 148 (usually rounded to 150) for the maximum size of a human social group. This is “Dunbar’s number”.

This could help to explain why archaeological evidence suggests that primitive societies (say, up to the early Neolithic period) were based upon small social groups of up to 150 individuals. Later and more sophisticated societies, such as the Roman Empire, and society today, rely for their functioning upon relatively small groups of individuals (the elite), such as the Roman Senate or the core group of MPs in a major political party in the House of Commons.



Dunbar's number is a suggested cognitive limit to the number of people with whom any of us can maintain stable social relationships. That is, relationships in which an individual knows who each person is, and how each person relates to every other person. Think of your Christmas card list (for those WEAG members old enough to participate in that tradition). Mine has never ever quite reached 150, and usually fluctuates around 100. For those who use social media, don't think in terms of “followers” of an individual, which can number in the millions for some “celebrities”. Think instead of how many individuals you actually know on those platforms and interact with regularly, and where you know the relationships between those individuals. Do you really know more than 150 people that well? Do you know how they are all related to each other?

I hear you ask another question: “What’s this got to do with WEAG?”.

WEAG currently has just over 100 members. Looking back at past records, I cannot find a time when WEAG’s membership reached 150, and I suspect that if it ever did, that didn’t last for very long. This is Dunbar’s number in action! WEAG’s membership is highly unlikely to exceed 150 for any length of time, unless of course WEAG members can grow bigger brains.

If you want to know more about this, just enter “Dunbar’s number” into Google; or ask your 150 friends.

WEAG'S WORK ON THE ROUTE OF THE M11

PART 3: BLACK COTTAGE

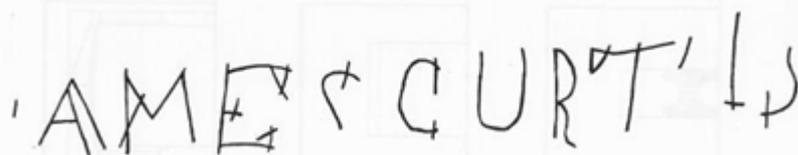
submitted by Lee Joyce

As was noted in the last edition of the WEAG newsletter Black Cottage, Harlow, was the only building of historical interest that was demolished in the building of the South Harlow to Birchanger (11 mile) section of the motorway.

This timber framed building was first 'discovered' on 3rd October 1971 during preliminary field walking along the proposed site of the M11. A brief survey was made in April 1972 by Rod Conlon. On the 11th September representatives of various local history groups including Rod Conlon, Adrian Gibson (Vernacular architecture specialist) and Katherine Davidson of Harlow Museum met to finalise plans for detailed recording in advance of its demolition. This involved the recording of all internal and external features exposed through systematic dismantling of the building including the removal of weather boarding externally, plaster board internally and later fireplaces finally revealing the earliest structure of the building. This work took place through September and October. On the 22nd of October a trial trench was cut across the internal width of the house along the northeast wall of the parlour and outshot, to test for early occupation of the site. Four distinct levels of archaeology were discovered, layer 4 contained un-abraded 17th metropolitan ware and was interpreted as the land surface at the time of construction. The cumulative evidence from this work suggests that the building was built towards the end of the 17th c. With a central lobby entrance chimney stack, symmetrical positioning of doors and windows and a weather boarded exterior, it was a fine example of a type which was particularly common in this part of Essex at the time. A detailed description of the timber framing was prepared by Adrian Gibson, a very brief summary of which is given here. The main frame was elm and pine with reused oak studs, protected externally with weatherboarding and filled internally with daub. The fully framed floors had common joists with diminished haunch soffit tennons and lambs tongue chamfer stops, matched on the bridging joists, side girths and fireplace lintels. Fireplaces in the kitchen, parlour and main bedroom (with a Tudor Arch surround) fed a fine concertina stack. Early 19th century modifications included moving the staircase from behind the chimney stack and into the kitchen, replacing the front and internal doors and door frames and reducing the size of all fireplaces. The exterior weatherboarding was also replaced at this time as was the original brick kitchen floor. Pottery and fragments of clay tobacco pipe found behind the bricked-up kitchen fireplace gave the 19th c date. Black Cottage was finally dismantled in 1973 and some of the more interesting woodwork was removed to Harlow Museum.



Unfortunately, they did not survive the rigors of time. One other feature of interest was the name [J] ames Curtis scratched into the distemper coated wall of the second bedroom and concealed by later boarding.



It is known that in 1797 the occupant of the cottage was a tradesman called William Curtice who owned the house and lived there with six others, probably his family. Trail trenching around the site also revealed a Romano British ditch.

References.

- Betts, T A. 1974 Black Cottage (Reported by Storey, A.) Essex Archaeological News, Autumn 1974
- Conlon, RFB. 1973. 'Black Cottage, Harlow Tye.' Stort Valley Area Study Group Newsletter 6. January 1973
- Conlon, RFB. 1974. 'Black Cottage, Harlow Tye.' Report of an investigation on behalf of Harlow Museum and the M11 South section committee. January 1974 (unpublished typescript)
- Joyce, Lee. WEAG'S WORK ON THE ROUTE OF THE M11 PART 2: THE SITES. WEAG NEWSLETTER JULY 2020
- Robertson, Ian G. 1976 The archaeology of the M11 Motorway in Essex, 1970 – 75.

WEAG CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Lecture Program

September's Rudge Lecture has sadly been cancelled but will now be replaced by 'Medieval Church Wall Paintings in Essex' by Lee and Claire. This talk will be accessible via the internet and NOT in person at the usual venue, further details to follow in the next newsletter. We'd like your help in summarising each of the remote talks/lectures to be included in the following newsletter for those members who do not have internet access.

Lectures are in the committee room at Woodford County High School, High Road, Woodford Green, IG8 9LA at 7:15pm unless otherwise stated.

Non-members are welcome to attend Lectures. A voluntary contribution of £2 would be appreciated from guests.

Monday 14 September 2020 @ 19:15

'Medieval Church Wall Paintings in Essex'. *Speakers: Lee Joyce & Claire Hooper.*

Monday 12 October 2020 @ 19:15

'Highams in Walthamstow'. *Speaker: Georgina Green.*

Monday 9 November 2020 @ 19:15

'Non-Invasive Archaeology'. *Speaker: Melinda Barham.*

Monday 7 December 2020 @ 19:15

Social (book sales and refreshments) and roundup of member activities.

Monday 11 January 2021 @ 19:15

Details to be confirmed

Monday 8 February 2021 @ 19:15

'Bricks in Essex'. *Speaker: Anne Padfield.* Anne is a local historian and English Heritage guide at Hill Hall.

Monday 8 March 2021 @ 19:15

AGM and 'Progress in the last 12 months at Bankside Rose'. *Speaker: Harvey Sheldon, Birkbeck College, WEAG President.*

Monday 12 April 2021 @ 19:15

'Historic Cultural Landscapes in South West Essex'. *Speaker: Tricia Moxey.*

Monday 10 May 2021 @ 19:15

The Rudge Lecture – 'to be announced'. *Speaker: Mike "Mr Stonehenge" Parker Pearson.*