

SAHS LECTURE DATES & DETAILS 2026-27

Key: [L] live at the Wade Street Church, Lichfield. [Z] By Zoom.

18th Sept 2026 [L]

Matthew Beamish (University of Leicester Archaeological Services)

A detailed UAS (drone) survey of Ryknield Street in Sutton Park

Matthew Beamish is an archaeologist who has been working in Leicestershire and the East Midlands for over 35 years. His work has included a number of landscape surveys using LiDAR data, and these have included Beacon Hill and Bradgate Park (Leicestershire), Black Down (Mendip, Somerset) and Hillsborough promontory fort (Ilfracombe, Devon).

ULAS and SUMO Geographical Surveys were commissioned by the Friends of Sutton Park to undertake a detailed survey of Ryknield Street in Sutton Park, Sutton Coldfield, Birmingham, in February and March 2025. The Roman road in the park is exceptionally well preserved. The work included UAV (drone) photogrammetry and LiDAR recording with the interpreted results targeted in a subsequent walkover survey. The work was successful in clarifying the extent and location of the road's agger, and roadside ditches and pits, revealing previously undetected features in the more wooded areas.

2nd Oct 2026 [Z]

Dr. Simon Briercliffe (University of Birmingham)

The Irish in the Victorian Black Country

Dr. Simon Briercliffe is a historian of the Black Country. He completed his doctoral research at University of Birmingham in 2022 on the experiences of Irish immigrants to Victorian Wolverhampton, and is now an Honorary Research Fellow there and part of the editorial board for the journal *Midland History*. He is also a Researcher at the Black Country Living Museum, and published his first book based on that in 2021: *Forging Ahead: Austerity to Prosperity in the Black Country 1945-1968*.

In the mid-nineteenth century, thousands of Irish people settled in the Black Country fleeing famine at home and seeking a new life. This talk will look at their experiences, the prejudice they faced and the way they developed a community in their new home. It will focus particularly on Wolverhampton's Caribee Island, but draw on experiences from across the region.

16th Oct 2026 [L]

Shane Kelleher (Staffordshire County Archaeologist)

Tales of the Trench: Recent Archaeological Work in Staffordshire

Shane Kelleher has been the Staffordshire County Archaeologist since 2018. Prior to that, he ran Industrial Heritage Support, a Historic England-funded project, which provides support and guidance to organisations that look after protected, interpreted and publicly accessible industrial heritage and archaeology sites in England. The project was hosted by the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust, where Shane had been the Archaeology and Monuments Officer. This post saw him lead on all archaeological and historic built environment matters for the Trust, including running Ironbridge Archaeology, the Trust's commercial archaeology unit, the Ironbridge Young Archaeologists' Club, and advising on the conservation, management and interpretation of the heritage assets and archaeological collections in the Trust's care. Before taking up his role at Ironbridge, Shane was a Historic Building Specialist and Project Manager at Birmingham Archaeology, the University of Birmingham's commercial archaeology unit. Shane studied at University College Cork in Ireland where he took a degree in Archaeology and Geography and an MA in Archaeology. He then took an MA in the Archaeology of Buildings at the University of York. He is a visiting lecturer at Birmingham City University and has been a visiting lecturer at the Ironbridge Institute at the University of Birmingham, where he was an Honorary Research Associate. Shane has been a board member of the Birmingham Conservation Trust, a council member of the Association for Industrial Archaeology, and an Archives and Collections committee member of the Historic Metallurgy Society.

Shane will provide an update on recent archaeological work carried out in the county. The talk will include the unearthing of Romano British agricultural settlements at Watery Lane, Curborough and Newbold Quarry, Barton-under-Needwood, extra mural industrial activity near the Roman fort at Chesterton, the remains of lost manor houses in Burton-upon-Trent and Kings Bromley, Bronze Age burnt mounds in Gailey, and human remains associated with Lichfield Friary. It will also include recent works at Dieulacres Abbey near Leek, and the discovery of timber framed buildings in Stafford and Abbots Bromley. The talk will conclude with a summary of various projects, partnerships, interpretation schemes and strategies that Shane and his team have supported, or have been involved in delivering, over the past few years.

30th Oct 2026 [Z]

Dr. Cassandra Crawford (Calibre Conservation)

Conservation, Genealogy and Memory: The Erdeswicke Commemorative Ensemble at All Saints Church, Sandon

Dr. Cassandra Crawford is an architectural conservator and specialist in historic decorative surfaces, architectural paint research, and polychromed sculpture. She founded Calibre Conservation in 2017 following more than a decade of professional conservation practice, research, and university teaching.

She studied Conservation and Restoration at the University of Lincoln, where she completed her Master's and doctoral studies. Her PhD focused on a scientific and multi-theoretical critical analysis of the polychromed Romanesque stone frieze sculpture on the west front of Lincoln Cathedral.

Between 2004 and 2010, she taught Conservation and Restoration at undergraduate and postgraduate level at the University of Lincoln, developing expertise in both conservation theory and practice. During this period, she also obtained a Postgraduate Certificate in Education.

Her research interests centre on historic paint analysis, architectural paint finishes, wall paintings, and the conservation of polychromed surfaces. As Director of Calibre Conservation, she leads projects involving decorative interiors, funerary monuments, stone sculpture, and complex historic buildings. Her work combines rigorous scientific investigation with a strong commitment to material authenticity, minimal intervention, and the preservation of cultural significance.

This presentation examines the conservation of the remarkable Erdeswicke commemorative ensemble at All Saints Church, Sandon, Staffordshire. The Grade I listed church contains a rare combination of genealogical wall paintings, funerary monument, and tomb chests associated with the antiquary Sampson Erdeswicke (c.1538–1603), author of the Survey of Staffordshire. Created during a period when genealogy and heraldry played an increasingly important role in expressing lineage, status, and identity, the ensemble represents an exceptional survival of post-Reformation commemorative culture. Conservation undertaken by Calibre Conservation provided a unique opportunity to investigate the material history of the wall paintings and monuments through condition surveys, environmental monitoring, scientific analysis, and treatment. The work revealed the significant impact of moisture ingress, soluble salts, and earlier restoration campaigns, particularly the long-term effects of twentieth-century wax-based conservation treatments. Cleaning and conservation uncovered previously obscured polychromy, gilding, heraldic details, and decorative schemes, offering new insights into the original appearance and evolution of the ensemble. The project demonstrates how conservation can function not only as a means of stabilising historic fabric but also as a powerful research tool for understanding the relationship between genealogy, antiquarianism, memory, and material culture in late Tudor and early Stuart England.

13th Nov 2026 [L]

Dr. Mike Hodder (University of Birmingham)

Acton Trussell Roman villa and Roman (and prehistoric) Staffordshire

Dr. Mike Hodder is a long-standing member of the Society. His early days in archaeology were spent as a schoolboy volunteer on the Society's excavations at Wall Roman site and he now volunteers at the museum there. Formerly Sandwell Borough Archaeologist, then Birmingham City Council's Planning Archaeologist, he is Honorary Lecturer in Archaeology at the University of Birmingham. He researches all periods of the archaeology of the West Midlands region, and he has published two books and many articles on various sites and landscapes. He co-edited, with Dr Roger White, *Clash of Cultures? the Romano-British period in the West Midlands*. He is a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries and a Member of the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists.

The unexpected discovery of an apsidal stone wall near Acton Trussell church led to over 30 years of excavations by the Penk Valley Archaeology Group, directed by the late Tony Habberley. These revealed timber and stone-based Roman buildings, including a probable bath house and mosaic floors, which lay within a ditched and subsequently stone-walled enclosure. Remains of prehistoric activity on the site included worked flint, pottery, a possible burnt mound, gullies, a stockade and a possible enclosure. A report on the excavations, published in the current volume of the Society's Transactions, includes a discussion of the wider context of the site in prehistoric and Roman Staffordshire.

27th Nov 2026 [Z]

Dr. Rebecca Boyd (IAC Archaeology)

Drumclay Crannog: Finding its Place and its People

Dr Rebecca Boyd is an archaeologist with a special interest in the houses of early medieval and Viking-Age Ireland. She has published extensively on Ireland's Viking-Age archaeology,

including writing a book about the archaeology of daily life and the homes found in Ireland's Viking-Age towns. Rebecca works as Senior Research Archaeologist for IAC Archaeology where she works on compiling final reports and publications across all of the organisation's excavations

Drumclay Crannog was excavated in 2012-13 revealing a remarkable sequence of occupation beginning in the 9th century AD. Crannogs are man-made islands found across

Ireland and Scotland dating from prehistoric times to the medieval period. Drumclay is a medieval crannog with spectacular archaeological preservation of houses, yards,

artefacts and animal and plant remains. A team of 35+ specialists have been involved in the post- excavation analysis of this assemblage, including archaeologists, artefact specialists, chronologists, environmental archaeologists, historians, geologists, and researchers. This multidisciplinary analysis has allowed us to reconstruct life at Drumclay, with its peaks and dips in activity at the site over ten centuries. This talk will be wide-ranging, with an introduction to the scale and quality of the archaeology excavated as well as the breadth of analyses undertaken. Together, we will explore how all these analyses have been brought together to unearth the story of life at Drumclay.

26th Feb 2027 [Z]

Dr. Pauline M. Clarke (University of Chester)

Life in the Welsh Marches in the Early Medieval period through the Portable Antiquities Scheme

Dr. Pauline M. Clarke is a Visiting Research fellow, and Visiting Lecturer at the University of Chester, where she completed her BA (Hons.), MA and PhD. A former Finds Liaison Officer with the Portable Antiquities Scheme, and the Finds Supervisor with the Bamburgh Research Project, she specialises in artefact study, particularly in their landscape context.

The Portable Antiquities Scheme has generated a wealth of data about artefacts, particularly useful in areas where little archaeological activity takes place. Using a cross-border approach, the distribution of artefacts from the early medieval period, found across the modern English/Welsh March is examined. The results show that Anglo-Saxon culture was introduced to the area earlier than is often considered, and reveals possible 'productive sites'. This presentation is a summary of a PhD project, supervised at the University of Chester.

12th March 2027 [L]

Dr. Duncan Frankis (Birmingham Newman University)

Birmingham Brass Founders: Politics & Industry during the Age of Revolution

Duncan began his academic career at Aberystwyth University studying European History during his undergraduate degree, and focusing on Early Modern British History for his MA.

Following the completion of his MA in 2012, he spent two years as a researcher for an international development charity based in Honduras before returning to the UK where he was granted a full PhD scholarship at the University of Birmingham.

Duncan's thesis focused on the historical links between politics and industry in the West Midlands – during the age of the Atlantic Revolutions. Whilst studying at the University of Birmingham he was appointed as a Teaching Fellow in History and Education, specialising in the Early Modern Atlantic World, the history of Honduras, and decolonizing the British education system.

Following the completion of his PhD, Duncan moved to Newman University to work as a lecturer in History and Applied Humanities – and became co-programme lead of History in January 2023. He has since completed his Post Graduate Certificate in Higher Education and become a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy (Advance HE). He also works as a reviewer for the *Journal of Eighteenth Century Studies* and is turning his PhD into a book.

During the long eighteenth-century Birmingham was known as the city of a thousand trades, and its industrial and scientific networks have been explored extensively in the academic literature of the West Midlands. However, there is a dark political history involving many of the most prominent and famous industrialists that is generally overlooked. In this seminar, Duncan Frankis (Newman University) discusses the political manoeuvring, cutthroat capitalism, and less-than-reputable trade links amassed by a group of politically conscious industrialists based in the town in the late eighteenth century.

2nd April 2027 [Z]

Dr. Jacob Fredrickson (University of Edinburgh)

'Whose Utopia?' Belonging, Community and Property-Owning Democracy in Bournville, Birmingham 1950-1970

Dr. Jacob Fredrickson is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the University of Edinburgh. Prior to this, he was the Director of the Centre for Midlands History and Cultures at the University of Birmingham, and a research fellow working on new histories of utopian garden cities, with a focus on Bournville. His work has featured in *Twentieth Century British History* and *Cultural and Social History*, and his first monograph, *Crimes of Passion: Violence and the Making of Modern Love*, is forthcoming.

Who does Bournville 'belong to'? In one telling of this story, the answer might be the Cadbury family, and particularly George and Richard Cadbury, the brothers who moved the Cadbury firm to the 'factory in a garden'. Bournville promised a new vision for worker welfare, guided by the Cadbury's Quaker faith and liberal politics. Certainly, histories of Bournville can give this impression. Yet in this paper, Dr. Fredrickson will explore a period of Bournville's history not usually included in the grand narratives of Cadbury's philanthropy: the mid-twentieth century. It is a moment where, for the first time, Bournville Village Trust lose freehold autonomy over Bournville Village. This paper brings to life this rather choppy and contested moment

in the trust's history, where home-owners on the Bournville estate increasingly challenge the power and authority of the Cadbury family, particularly in their vision for the estate's future home-building plans. In so doing, it explores how Bournville responded to the political, social, and economic co-ordinates of the mid-twentieth century: one very different to the late nineteenth century that spawned the original 'utopia'.

9th April 2027 [L]

Dr. Stephen Hewett

The Civic Gospel and Municipal Reform: the Establishment of the Municipal Public Library in Birmingham, 1851 to 1898.

Dr. Stephen Hewett worked for nearly forty years in Library Services at the University of Birmingham, retiring in 2013. Following retirement, his interest in regional and local history led him to take the MA in West Midlands History (2016-2017), under the Directorship of Dr Malcolm Dick OBE. This was followed soon after by undertaking doctoral research into the history of Birmingham's public library service. His thesis was accepted for the award of PhD in 2026.

This paper is based on a recent successful doctoral thesis (University of Birmingham) which investigated the place of the free public library in the civic cultural landscape of one Victorian industrial town during a period of growing municipal activism. It discusses the establishment of Birmingham's public library service and argues that its establishment played a significant part in the philosophy of the nonconformist minister, George Dawson (1821-1876), whose call for municipal improvement – his Civic Gospel – involved providing for the cultural as well as the physical needs of Birmingham's citizens. Dawson wanted to see a city that 'cares as much for the culture of her people as for the sweeping of her streets', believing that access to books was as important as the provision of sanitation.

This talk will briefly discuss the extent to which a culture of book lending existed in the town before the arrival of the first public library in Birmingham; the motives of those individuals who campaigned for – or were involved in - their administration, particularly its first Chief Librarian, John Davies Mullins; the physical representation of the public library in the town, looking at what their architectural style and interior design tells us about the expectations and values of those involved in their planning.

23rd April 2027 [Z]

Mark Graham (Grampus Heritage and Training Ltd., Cumbria)

High Tarns Archaeology Project

Mark Graham is Project Manager at Grampus Heritage and Training Limited, Cumbria, where he has worked since January 2000. He holds Bachelor's degrees in Heritage Management (University of Lancashire) and Forestry (Tampere University of Applied Sciences, Finland), and a Master's degree in Archaeology from Durham University.

Late in 2022, whilst using new aerial photographs to search for evidence of a 'grange farm' known to have been established by the Cistercian monastery of Holme Cultram in west Cumbria by 1200 AD, Grampus Heritage and Training Limited identified an archaeological cropmark, and a geophysical survey the following year hinted at a site of archaeological interest beneath the surface. A subsequent magnetometry and resistance survey over an area of 11 hectares around the cropmark produced extremely interesting evidence of a previously unrecorded rich historic landscape. However, whilst the team thought they had found the Holme Cultram site, the subsequent excavation uncovered a different side of Cumbria's past...

This is the story of unearthing the largest Viking Age building to be discovered and excavated in Britain.

7th May 2027 [L]

Dr. Ruth Larsen (University of Derby)

Mistress: A History of Women and their Country Houses

Ruth has been at University of Derby, where she is the programme leader for the undergraduate History programmes, since 2005. She has published widely on learning and teaching in History and on elite families and their homes, including the 2025 book *Mistress: Women and their Country Houses*, co-written by (the late) Anthony Fletcher.

When architectural historian Mark Girouard coined the phrase 'power houses' to describe stately homes, he wrote only about men and their roles. But what was it like to be a woman in one these 'power houses'? In particular, how much did the female head of the household, the mistress of the house, share the power? This paper will explore the roles that women played in building the houses, in running the families and household, and in managing the networks that shaped elite life, and how they were central in shaping life in the country house.

21st May 2027 [Z]

Lauren Collier (National Trust)

Ordinary People with Extraordinary Impacts: The History of the Ironbridge Gorge

Lauren Collier is the Property Curator at Ironbridge Gorge - National Trust. She leads the collections team responsible for over 400,000 objects spanning social and industrial history, decorative arts, engineering, and transport. Lauren specialises in the Industrial Revolution and the global impact of Ironbridge Gorge, alongside wider cultural and women's history from the 18th to early 20th centuries.

Showcasing the globally significant Ironbridge Gorge, this talk explores the lives of those who worked in its 19th-century industries. It highlights iron and ceramic production, alongside supporting trades such as mining and river transport, and offers insight into the people, stories, and lasting global impact of this remarkable area.

4th June 2027 [L]

Justin Souter

The Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal

Julian Souter is a former English teacher and headmaster who lives in a canal-side property next to the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal with an end-of-garden mooring. His unique research, based on primary sources of evidence using archived material as well as parish records, wills and other documentation, has been distilled into a new book on the history of the canal from the early 18th century to the present day, published by Amberley Publishing in July 2026.

This talk will be an A-Z of the early history of the canal and will cover some of its most attractive features, the challenges faced in its construction, and insight into some of the key people involved in its earliest days.

Based on Julian's new book – the first book dedicated solely to the canal since Ian Langford's seminal *Towpath Guide to the Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal* published in 1974 – the talk will be illustrated with a wide range of photographs, maps, documents and other source material including the day-to-day records of the canal's construction, the landowners whose land the canal passed through, and a surviving plan of the canal produced in 1772. Myths will be challenged and exploded, and hitherto unknown aspects of the canal's route and structures revealed.