



## INTRODUCTION

Twenty one years ago, Basingstoke, an ordinary small town in north Hampshire, found itself with its heart ripped out and amidst growing mountains of chalk; it seemed to those living there at the time as though history had come to an end. Fortunately, however, there were a few who realised the significance of what was happening and, without trying to stop the imposed development, took steps to record and rescue as much as possible. An informal Archaeological Group attached to the Willis Museum was the core of our own Basingstoke Archaeological and Historical Society.

Twenty one years later, Basingstoke is still growing but, like an adolescent teenager, is maturing and coming to terms with its new size. And the Society? Well, it too has grown and, by drawing in new blood, has been able to expand its activities to include not only excavation and lectures but field walking, training, publishing, documentary research and filming. It still relies heavily on its founding fathers (and mothers), whose energies and experience are as evident and vital now as then, and who themselves are training the next generation.

In celebrating our coming of age we are not intending to give a retrospective view of the Society's work over the last twenty one years but rather a retrospective view of the history of Basingstoke over the last twenty one centuries or so. I hope that we can show that 1971, far from being the end of the town's history, is only a recent chapter and that its past is still very much there all around for us to see and enjoy.

Richard Dexter  
(Chairman)

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## SUMMARIES OF THE CONFERENCE PAPERS

### **The Hills are Alive: The Earlier Prehistory of the Basingstoke Area**

Julie Gardiner

This paper is largely based on the Speaker's own PhD research into Neolithic and Bronze Age flint assemblages from Hampshire and the neighbouring counties of Sussex and Dorset. In the northern part of Hampshire, the bulk of the evidence used in that research came from collections amassed by the Basingstoke antiquarian G. W. Willis which, up to that point, remained largely unknown and certainly uncatalogued.

Distribution maps of known Mesolithic and Neolithic sites in Hampshire, up to the time of publication of *The Archaeology of Hampshire*, in 1981, show the presence of a number (28) of early Neolithic long barrows, a couple of poorly excavated flint mine sites, and very little else. Mesolithic sites congregate on the Greensands and southern downland slopes overlooking the Hampshire Basin but the chalk downs, for the most part, are apparently empty. 'Non-monumental' Neolithic sites are completely absent and it is not until the Bronze Age that any sort of settlement or land-use pattern can be discerned.

Research has shown that the northern Hampshire Downs, and the area around Basingstoke in particular, were well populated before the Late Bronze Age but that the majority of the evidence is in the form of surface flint scatters, most known examples of which reside, unloved and untouched, in museum stores.

Mesolithic sites are present in this area. Willis collected small groups of Late Mesolithic material from the river gravels and clay-with-flints where they were frequently mixed with later material.

Over 50 Neolithic flint sites have been identified amongst the Willis material, collected within a radius of approximately 12 km of the centre of Basingstoke. The location of sites throughout the Neolithic shows a marked preference for clay-with-flints which, although heavy and unmanageable now, once provided the best soils in the area for farming. The relationship between long barrows and other Early Neolithic material is complex and awaits clarification, but is demonstrably not random, despite the ephemeral nature of Early Neolithic flintwork.

The majority of these scatters, however, represent Late Neolithic-Early Bronze Age domestic activities reflected in the wide range of artifacts, from heavy axes and picks to all manner of lightweight flake tools. The tools are made from local surface flint and there is little indication of imported goods other than a few stone axes. The distribution of known scatters suggests that sites occurred between 2 and 4 km apart and that access to good soils, adequate flint sources and a good supply of water (either ponded on the clay-with-flints or in streams and rivers) were the basic requirements. The distribution and composition of the assemblages can be compared with those from Sussex and Dorset to reveal both broad similarities and startling differences.

During the mature Bronze Age there is a clear shift in emphasis in many respects of material culture. Sites move away from the clay-with-flints and become recognisably nucleated settlements, albeit of small size. The appearance of round barrows, of new burial rites, the dividing up of large areas of the chalk downland into field systems and the adoption of metalworking and abandonment of flintworking indicate profound changes in the economic base and set the stage for dramatic developments in the Iron Age.

## **Beyond Pits and Postholes: The Iron Age in the Basingstoke Area**

**Richard Newman**

Basingstoke and its vicinity has produced much evidence in the past thirty years for the Iron Age period. As with other parts of Hampshire, such as the Andover and Winchester areas, urban expansion and infrastructure development have led to the identification and exploration of many new sites. Enough work has now been completed to begin to draw wider interpretations about the Iron Age of the Basingstoke locality and to assess its significance in national terms.

The raw data, often occurring as soil-filled features cut into chalk bedrock can, when examined properly, reveal aspects of the development of settlement patterns and types, and can be used to make inferences concerning the evolution of Iron Age society. In undertaking this work, salutary lessons have been learnt by archaeologists, particularly in relation to the selection of sites for excavation and the approaches to the excavation strategy. Much of our information for recognising potential sites is based on aerial photographs and this has led to a bias in the types of features that have been investigated.

The archaeologists' approaches have been conditioned by the need for a targeted rescue-based strategy. In general, this has been shown not to be the most appropriate method of researching our past, and it has reduced the value of our results in particular for the Iron Age of the Basingstoke area. If we are to add to our collection of pits and postholes and make them more relevant to the study of our past, a more research-orientated strategy is required.

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## **From Tribe to Kingship: Reflections on Roman and Saxon Basingstoke**

**Martin Millett**

As one who left active work in the Basingstoke area when your Society was only ten years old, I would like to offer something of an outsider's perspective on the contribution of Basingstoke to our understanding of the Roman and early Saxon periods.

The Basingstoke area is not well known for its spectacular Roman sites; the enclosed rural farmsteads which characterize the later Iron Age do continue in occupation, but there are few signs of any increased prosperity or development. Nonetheless, the area has had an important impact on the study of Roman Britain and continues to do so. The first major contribution comes from Professor Shimone Applebaum whose important paper on the

distribution of the Romano-British population (1953) formed the basis for one of the strands of analysis published in his contribution to the *Cambridge Agrarian History of England and Wales* (1972). Although criticized at the time for its over-emphasis on surface finds, it remains of considerable interest, not least for prefiguring a whole trend in British archaeology towards the use of survey evidence.

The second interesting contribution comes from Lodge Farm, North Warnborough, at the edge of your area (although I can remember field-walking nearby with several members of your Society in the winter of 1980-81). Here, an interesting excavation conducted by Dorothy M. Liddell uncovered much of the plan of a Roman house and bath block in 1929-30 (Liddell 1929; 1931). Although a good excavation for its time, the site is not particularly remarkable. The excavator's observation, however, about the distribution of finds within the site and their relationship to the possible use of the rooms was picked up by Applebaum (1972, 135) and has more recently been highlighted by Richard Hingley (1989, 43) in his discussion of a social archaeology of the Romano-British countryside. The site is also rapidly becoming the centre piece for those wishing to discuss gender in archaeological interpretation (eg. at the most recent meeting of the Theoretical Roman Archaeology Group). It is certainly one of the earliest excavations where spatial patterning of finds was found interesting, although many archaeologists are now appreciating how important such information might be.

I hesitate to mention my third topic, the Anglo-Saxon site at Cowdery's Down, the responsibility for the excavation of which I held (Millett and James 1983; James *et al.* 1984). The almost accidental discovery of the most important phase of this site will always act as a warning to those who deride the role of rescue excavation and prefer the wholly planned strategy. Aside from the interest of the spectacular buildings in their own right and the immeasurable contribution that Simon James's reconstruction drawings have made to changing people's perception of "Saxon Huts", the principal importance of that site lay in enabling us to make some sense of a wide range of other sites across Britain. This analysis seems to have taken root since we published, but it is only fair to say that the jury is still out on our suggestions concerning the re-interpretation of buildings on the Continent.

I hope that these three examples will provide a suitable cerebral celebration of your Society's coming of age. I believe that they show something of what Basingstoke's archaeology has contributed in the past, and hope that they offer a model for what might be achieved in the future.

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## **Inns and Inventories: Some Timber Framed Buildings**

Bill Fergie

### Demolition and Speculation

The demolition of much of Basingstoke's town centre in the mid 1960's, without any proper recording of what was lost, has greatly reduced our chances of understanding the process of development and re-development through the centuries.

The study of vernacular buildings often requires the unravelling of a complicated history of change to the interior and exterior. Photographic evidence of the exterior of a building will often only indicate the latest phase of a long process of evolution. If there is no documentary evidence for buildings which have been lost and not properly recorded we can rely only on speculation about what might have existed.

### Town Centre Moves South?

There seems to be good evidence that the centre of gravity of the town moved south from the area around St. Michael's Church in the later Medieval period. This move may have coincided with the decline in the importance of Winchester and the development of other routes to the west. The increase in importance of the route through Basingstoke may have been a reason to move the road out of the valley to the higher and drier land to the south. The early inns and later coaching inns appear to have been located exclusively in the streets of this southern part of the town centre.

### Vernacular Buildings in the Basingstoke Area

Basingstoke appears to have been located on the boundary between the two broad timber

framing traditions which developed during the later medieval period. In the 13th., 14th., and 15th. centuries timber framing was characterised by the cruck method of construction in the areas to the north and west. Cruck frames appear, however, not to have been employed in the south-eastern counties. Conversely, some forms of eastern construction, particularly the aisled hall and the collar purlin roof are rare in the west. By about 1500, all these earlier forms of construction had been abandoned to be replaced throughout the south by a form of construction which employed queen post roof trusses with side purlins. With one exception, the surviving vernacular buildings appear to post-date this change.

### Development Density in the Town Centre

The indications are that the centre of Basingstoke in the 15th. and 16th. centuries was not subject to the kind of economic pressure that meant that street frontage was at a premium. Buildings appear to have occupied quite large plots and they were built with their long axes parallel to the street. There is evidence from early maps and documentary sources to suggest that farming uses were probably mixed up with other commercial activities.

### Buildings of the 15th., 16th. and 17th. Centuries

Existing buildings, and one accurately recorded demolished building, show a consistent pattern of development. Anne Hawker's documentary evidence matches some of the buildings. Although much of the main framework of the buildings remains, the essential details at ground floor level are missing and this makes it difficult to establish the precise uses to which they were put.

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## **Inns and Inventories: Documentary Evidence**

Anne Hawker

Apart from having a pleasant sound, the title "Inns and Inventories" has some relevance because it is usually possible to deduce that a property is, in fact, an inn from the presence in the Inventory of a larger than common number of chambers or bedrooms and a higher proportion of chamber pots!

The story the Inventories tell is all that is left in most cases of the early Tudor buildings of Basingstoke. Behind the frontage of some shops can be discovered the sad remains of the frames of a very few dwellings. But progress has done away with the town centre, so that all that can be said is that until the beginning of the 1960's we had Tawkes, Vallens, St. John's Chapel, the house Lorimer built, Horwoods, Silvers, Clavens, Withgars, Wolfes, Sparkes, Rays, Creswells, old Kingmills House and Bird Bros. This last is about the only

point where the information I have and the solid measurements made by Mr Richard Warmington come together.

The house in Church Street that became Bird Brothers Printers was originally a house owned by William Grete, a butcher. He either bought it from the Marquess of Winchester or rented it, but he definitely lived there because he says so in his Will. Confusion arises when we know that a man owned several houses but it does not say which he occupied on the day he died. This house would be that in the Inventory with his Will. William Grete also had a house in Wote Street, Santorns, and paid rent for the field that went with the Chequer, Chequer Mead.

The Chequer, later Anchor, still stands, transformed, but at least possessing the skeleton of wood that has supported it for some, perhaps, five hundred years. It, too, was the property of a large landowner: Mr Kingsmill in 1487; John Poulet in 1574; the Marquess of Winchester in 1601. These gentlemen owned most of Basingstoke in one way or another and probably kept a house for occasional use ... but which? Perhaps the Angel (demolished in the 1930's) or Gregories (the last barn of the farm of that name burned down during the Crimean War), or the Inn called Brightwises, or Keyes or Haywards or the George ... I prefer not to guess.

Catherine of Aragon stayed with Mr Kingsmill on her way to Dogmersfield. Now, if that had only been today when the goings-on of every member of the Royal Family are recorded in detail in the papers we could even have had a picture !!

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## **Gates and Gardens: Recent Work at Basing House**

David Allen

This paper will deal with excavation work at Basing House over the past fifteen years.

### **The Citadel Gate**

Between 1978 and 1983 the focus of attention was the main gate into the Citadel. Four periods of gatehouse construction were identified, ranging from a medieval timber structure with outlying drawbridge pit, to the great brick edifice with octagonal corner towers raised by William Paulet.

There was a suggestion of some minor modification during the Civil War siege, and every indication that the defunct gatehouse of a derelict Citadel was made into a pleasant



approach to walled gardens or vineyards, after the Restoration. A report on this work is now at an advanced stage.

### The Walled Garden

In 1987 and 1988, excavations took place in the Walled Garden, near to the NW corner dovecote. The principal objective was to see if any archaeological features survived in a location earmarked for a Period Garden. The soil had been extremely well-worked, the area having served as a kitchen garden and allotment, but low brick walls were found marking out three sides of a rectangle.

These Tudor walls were examined, recorded and sealed, and modern replicas built on the same alignments. They became the boundaries of a freelance Period Garden which used images from Paulet family history as its main decorative features.

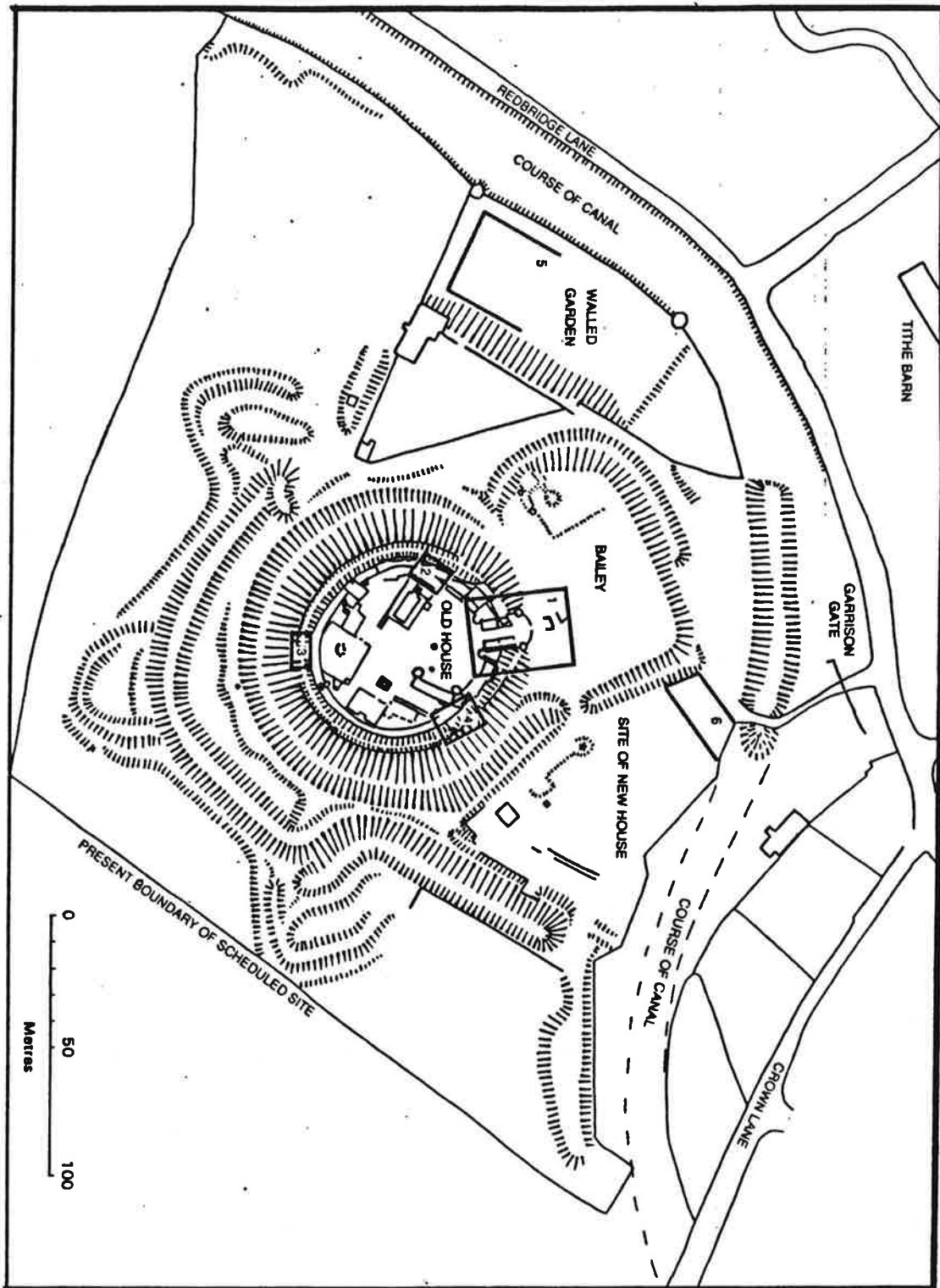
Further work may take place in this area, but the rest of the Walled Garden is likely to contain structural features.

### The Postern Gate

In 1991, limited work took place on the postern gate on the east side of the Citadel. This had been examined by the Aldermaston Archaeological Society in 1968, and a recent landslip necessitated a tidy-up operation. Six periods of activity were identified, and the existence of a narrow gate passage, up to and during the Civil War period, was proven.

The most remarkable find apparently related to the Civil War episode. In a shallow gully at the centre of the passage, excavation revealed the skull of a man aged 21-40. The presence of three vertebrae showed that this was a severed head, and the skull had also received a sword cut to the cranium. Such a find in such a location could be best explained as a Civil War casualty, and it may even be that he lost his life in the final onslaught of 14th Oct 1645.

The postern gate was blocked with large quantities of brick wall and dressed stone from the area immediately adjacent, and further afield. Examination of this material continues to provide some surprises.



**BASING HOUSE**

- 1. Citadel gate
- 4. Postern gate
- 5. Walled Garden

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#### Abbreviations

HFC = Hampshire Field Club Proceedings

HOMS = Hampshire County Museum Service