



BASINGSTOKE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Newsletter

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CALENDAR

Thursday 30th January	Lecture by Peter Reynolds on 'The Experimental Iron Age Farm at Butser', Chute House, 7.30 p.m.
Wednesday 5th February	Bone Seminar, Willis Museum Annexe, 7.30 p.m.
Friday 7th February to Sunday 9th February	Rural Settlement in S. Britain (Iron Age - Roman) Non-residential weekend conference organised by University of Southampton Department of Extra-Mural Studies.
Wednesday 12th February	Bone Seminar, Willis Museum Annexe, 7.30 p.m.
Saturday 15th February	Lecture by Austin Whitaker (Winchester City Archivist) Winchester Memories, Spoken and Written. Sessions Hall, Guildhall, Winchester. 3.00 p.m.
Wednesday 19th February	Bone Seminar, Willis Museum Annexe, 7.30 p.m.
Thursday 27th February	Lecture by Collin Bowen on 'The Evolution of the Landscape', Chute House, 7.30 p.m.

By the time you have turned to read this page of this issue of the Newsletter you will no doubt have studied and formed an opinion on the striking new look cover sheet. The symbol at the top depicts the most spectacular find of the Ructstalls Hill excavations, the set of Roman dividers. Very few of these instruments have been found in Britain, so the Committee felt it fitting that we should incorporate 'ours' into the letter heading of our official stationery and Newsletter.

THE RADIOCARBON REVOLUTION

Lecture by Prof. A.C. Renfrew, 28th November 1974

At the Society's last lecture, held on the 28th November at Chute House, a gratifyingly large audience had the memorable opportunity of hearing Professor Colin Renfrew outline how the more effective use of Radiocarbon dating methods had revolutionised the chronology of Western European prehistoric development.

Professor Renfrew showed how monuments such as the corbel built long-barrow at Newgrange, County Meath, (which resembles the plan and building technique of the Treasury of Atreus at Mycenae) and megalithic structures of North Western Europe had misled the early archaeologists into an erroneous dating sequence. Their chronology was based upon the reasonable assumption that the superior technologies of the Near East had initiated a cultural chain reaction from east to west via the Aegean.

This neat theory of cultural devolution remained unchallenged until the animal and plant remains found in the megalithic monuments were subjected to Radiocarbon dating processes which showed that they were virtually contemporaneous with their prototypes. However, Professor Renfrew pointed out that Radiocarbon dating tended to under-date samples taken from sites whose dates were well established by ancient calendar dates. These results caused scientists to look more closely at the Radiocarbon process with a view to establishing greater accuracy.

Professor Renfrew explained how all living matter absorbs radioactive Carbon 14 during respiration and ingestion. This causes an accumulation of C14 which ceases after death, leaving C14 as a residual element. Radiocarbon dating consists of the measurement of this residual Carbon 14 as it decays into the stable Carbon 12. The period of this decay is expressed on half-life and the half-life of C14 is approximately 6,000 years. Half-life itself is a term used to express the reduction by radioactive decay of the original isotope by half its original amount over a known mathematical period. Therefore, for the use of this dating process it is assumed that there are no major fluctuations in the amount of C14 in the atmosphere.

In an attempt to iron out the anomalies in Radiocarbon dating it was decided that the Californian "Bristle-cone" Pine, which is the earth's longest living plant, should be subjected to Radiocarbon dating and the results calibrated with the trees' own annual growth

rings. It was found that correlation of the "Bristle-cone" Pine dates and the Radiocarbon dates corresponded to the already observed anomalies. Thus it was possible to calibrate Radiocarbon results and obtain an accurate date. The most revolutionary aspect of this calibration technique was the discovery that the previously determined dates for the megalithic structures of Europe had been underdated by as much as 1,000 years. This in turn meant that structures such as Newgrange long-barrow were very much earlier than their supposed predecessors in the Middle East.

With this information archaeologists are now faced with a European prehistory that must cast aside the concept of the totally barbarous and ignorant society for one of innovation, skill and developing intellectualism, as expressed by their surviving structures which show considerable and original use of engineering skills and social organisation.

In this report I have tried to summarise Professor Renfrew's lecture for those members who may have missed it: needless to say any mistakes or inaccuracies are my own. Peter Heath, on behalf of the Committee and the audience, thanked Professor Renfrew for a most stimulating lecture, and no doubt, after Professor Renfrew's lecture, many people found a new sense of wonder when considering the early achievements of prehistoric man.

DUNCAN RUSSELL

MEMBERS EVENING 12th December 1974

Our annual cheese and wine party was once again an enjoyably successful evening to which approximately 40 members and their friends came. Events took their now traditional pattern of food and drinks first, while examining the 'links with the past' items brought by members, followed by slides, before discussing the various objects and treasures. John Oliver showed an interesting group of slides of familiar corners, buildings and places in and around Basingstoke, several of which have sadly had to make way for development. Barbara Applin surprised and entertained us by reciting a number of original and amusing limericks of local, personal and archaeological(!) appeal. The one that ended "... to escape from the people of Basing." was my particular favourite.

As in previous years the large and varied array of material brought along was interesting and thought provoking, some of it proving that even the most obvious and commonplace objects from bygone ages have appeal and charm. In particular, Richard Rushent-Oram exhibited and talked about another of his collections of glass bottles manufactured locally over the last 2 or 3 hundred years.

THE EXPERIMENTAL IRON-AGE FARM AT BUTSER

Our first lecture of 1975 will be given by Peter Reynolds at Chute House on Thursday 30th January at the usual time of 7.30 p.m. This unique experiment into the ways and means of farming under very primitive conditions will not be new to you as it has been the subject of quite a lot of publicity and you may have visited Butser with the Society. The enthusiasm and originality that Peter Reynolds has brought to the experiment promise to make for a stimulating and rewarding evening.

RURAL SETTLEMENT IN S. BRITAIN (Iron Age - Roman)

The Department of Extra-Mural Studies of the University of Southampton is holding a non-residential weekend conference at the University from 7th to 9th February. To quote from their advance details, the "... conference will examine the question of continuity and change in the settlement pattern from Iron Age into the Roman period, and the impact of Romanisation on the British landscape. The role of the villa and its decline will be considered, and for contrast a view of Roman and native sites in Gaul as revealed by aerial photography."

A nominal charge of £3.00 includes tea, coffee and biscuits, and sherry on the Friday evening. Applications to attend should be made to Mr. D.E. Johnston, Department of Extra-Mural Studies, The University, Southampton, SO9 5NH. Tel. Southampton 559122, Ext. 352/2167.

VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE IN HAMPSHIRE.

This one day school held in the University of Southampton buildings last November was an interesting introduction to the humbler buildings of Hampshire and the rest of the country. Vernacular Architecture was loosely defined as referring to those buildings which were erected without the guidance of an architect. The fact that these buildings are difficult to date was made by a number of speakers - the styles of grander architecture are only slowly assimilated, thus making dating on stylistic grounds inaccurate, building materials were frequently reused thus nullifying the use of radiocarbon dating and dendrochronology.

An example of the lessons that could be learnt from careful study was described in relation to a farmhouse on the path of the South Hampshire Motorway which was demolished under controlled conditions.

A brief survey of more recent buildings was given under the heading of "Houses for the Workers" and this was followed by hearing about the appropriate legislation and planning procedures applying to old buildings.

The day was concluded by a reminder of the need to record and assess the many buildings in the county. It was hoped that this work would make use of a new system for surveying and recording buildings recently introduced by the organisers of the meeting.

JOHN OLIVER

RESCUE ARCHAEOLOGY Edited by Philip A. Rahtz. Penguin, 1974. 90p.

Penguin Books Ltd. have kindly presented to the Society a complimentary copy of their paperback book 'Rescue Archaeology' edited by Philip Rahtz. It is a collection of short papers written by twenty different authors involved in rescue archaeology and describes the sort of sites being lost, who and what the agents of destruction are and proposes ways in which the situation can be remedied. On first glance the accounts are compelling, personal statements, written more for the layman than the expert; it even contains a chapter "Archaeology as a hobby and how to start"! It

should prove quite a popular book and should sell well. Those of you who have 90p to part with might care to look out for it in W.H. Smiths or other bookshops. Its cover carries the now very familiar 'Rescue' symbol of Stonehenge scooped up in a mechanical digger's bucket. On the other hand, if you prefer to borrow rather than buy books, it is available on loan through the Society's library in the usual way.

THE NOTITIA DIGNITATUM

Conference held at Rowley House, Oxford, 13th - 15th December 1974.

The Notitia Dignitatum is of importance because of the light it sheds on the organisation of the Roman Empire, in particular the arrangements prevailing in Britain. It consists of lists of official appointments throughout the Empire which exist in two different forms. Originally apparently intended to control official appointments, the lists were haphazardly kept up to date until c.408 AD, as a means of keeping a record of field army units in the Empire.

Various aspects of the document were discussed including the illustrations of the insignia of officials which accompany some of the MSS, the financial office of the largitiones and the official establishment for weaving in wool.

The main emphasis of the conference, however, was on military matters. Some talks concentrated on particular areas - Egypt, Mauretania, and, of particular interest in Britain, the military commands either side of the English Channel. Other military matters were discussed by Dr. Roxan who showed in great detail what a great degree of continuity there was between pre-Severan military units and those mentioned in the Notitia, while Dr. Tomlin explored the organisation of the mobile field armies and showed they were not perhaps so mobile as they were supposed to be since, of all the surviving epitaphs of field army soldiers, none apparently died in active service!

M.W.C. Hassall produced a detailed organisational chart of the arrangements existing in Britain according to the Notitia and the conference finished with a talk by C.E. Stevens plotting the intricate and confusing subsequent career of the Notitia in Britain in the Medieval period and the ways in which the information derived from it was used (and abused!) by Medieval English historians.

P.M.C. JUDKINS
