



# BASINGSTOKE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

## Newsletter

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### CALENDAR

Thursday 27th February	Lecture by Collin Bowen (Royal Commission on Historical Monuments) on 'The Evolution of the Landscape', Chute House, 7.30 p.m.
Wednesday 5th March	( Seminar on Animal Bones, Basingstoke
Wednesday 12th March	( Willis Museum Annexe, 7.30 p.m.
Saturday 15th March	Lecture by Michael Hughes (Archaeological Survey Officer, Hampshire Archaeological Committee) on 'The Norman Period in Hampshire'. Joint meeting organised by this Society and the Hampshire Field Club. Church Cottage, Basingstoke, 3.00 p.m.
Wednesday 19th March	Seminar on Animal Bones, Basingstoke Willis Museum Annexe, 7.30 p.m.
Thursday 27th March	Lecture by Dr. Edwin Course (Extra-Mural Department, University of Southampton) on 'Industrial Archaeology in Hampshire', Chute House, 7.30 p.m.

## ANIMAL BONE SEMINARS

Members may have been mystified by the Newsletter Calendar which indicates that the animal bone seminars are continuing while their programme card shows the same dates given over to pottery. We are in fact still dealing with bones! Iris Gregory is continuing with her analysis of the Ructstalls Hill material, helping the group identify the animal bone finds for themselves. Anyone who attended the earlier series may have been misled into thinking that these sessions are finished. Anyone who wants to apply their new knowledge could benefit from the Wednesday evenings at the Willis Museum Annexe.

## THE EXPERIMENTAL IRON-AGE FARM AT BUTSER

January's lecture by Peter Reynolds was a predictable success which attracted a large audience of over forty people.

After briefly outlining the purpose of the project, the events which led up to it, and its organisational and financial support, our speaker proceeded to show and talk over a selection of well-chosen colour slides illustrating the progress from its inception to the present, which is just over half-way in a three year pilot scheme leading to several long-term research studies.

Based on evidence obtained from the excavations at Maiden Castle, post holes and daub debris, they have constructed a roundhouse consisting of a wattle and daub wall built around a circular frame of posts with a central post to support a thatched roof. In construction, however, which adhered very strictly to the physical and documentary evidence available, it was found that the central post need not have functioned as a roof support. The structure's ability to withstand "two hurricanes", many severe gales and torrential storms lends support to Peter Reynolds' belief that around 300 BC the circular house design was fundamental and is a more accurate interpretation than a rectilinear dwelling. A second circular hut with turf walls and a central post was also proving functional, serviceable and weather resistant.

In Southern Britain a common feature of Iron-Age sites is the number of underground pits to be found. The many uses to which such pits could have been put, both initially and subsequently, is a question always demanding careful interpretation of the excavator. To test various hypotheses, and particularly those associated with the storage of grain, a number of different shaped pits have been cut experimentally and lined with alternative materials, or left unlined, filled with various corns and left undisturbed for the winter, except for scientific monitoring of temperature changes, gaseous emissions and so on. In the following spring, germination experiments have yielded fascinating results of over 90% germination from seed grain stored in unlined pits where the moisture content was in the region of 16%. The optimum shape appears to be the familiar bell- or hive-shaped pit.

A number of different crops have been harvested including Einkorn, Emmer and Spelt wheats, six-row barley, rye and flax,

celtic beans and vetch. Crops grown directly on areas burned of their natural vegetation yielded well and were relatively weed free.

Animal husbandry has so far concentrated on St. Kilda sheep, pigs and two hybrid Dexter 'oxon' who, we were told, are shortly to be persuaded to plough using the primitive wooden design 'ard' plough.

Experiments of this kind are recent innovations in archaeology and are vital to our understanding of life as it was lived by peoples passed. Excavation can tell us only so much: without environmental evidence to support theory, interpretation may be only fanciful figments of a fertile imagination. Peter Reynolds is a devout searcher after truth who deserves our support and admiration.

#### RURAL SETTLEMENT CONFERENCE AT SOUTHAMPTON

This was the second in a series of annual conferences studying rural settlement to complement those on urban development held in Winchester in recent years. This year continued with Iron-Age/Roman settlement studies.

Professor Renfrew opened the conference, welcoming the members and making the plea that the term "Romano-British" might go out of use. Mr. P. Fowler gave us a provocative first lecture on "Dark Ages BC/AD", arguing the thesis that the Iron-Age and Saxon periods represent the mainstream of British history with the Roman period being an interesting, but relatively unimportant interruption.

Mr. D. Johnston, however, discussing the Romano/British landscape, argued that the Conquest brought real and fundamental changes, even if they were not lasting, and cited many examples of the exploitation of the environment and the improvement of agriculture in a commercial and tax-paying province. A new means of reconstructing Iron-Age and Roman farming conditions was proposed by Mr. I. Hodder who suggested that computer simulation provided a quick and cheap method of testing hypotheses. This, we felt, was certainly for the specialist though it did require full recording of excavated evidence by the archaeologist!

Dr. Webster gave us a masterly survey of Romano/British rural settlements, illustrating how their complexity and density are only now being realised. It was interesting to see how the situation we have in Basingstoke, with many sites of this period discovered during town development, can be echoed in other parts of the country where work has been done. Dr. Wightman, who has a book on "Gallia Belgica" due out soon, gave us a detailed survey of rural settlement types in Gaul, which it was interesting to compare with the British picture.

Mr. W. Rodwell started Sunday with a scholarly paper on the Trinovantes, of whom he has made a special study. This was particularly fascinating as most of it was unpublished research,

and added considerably to the traditional picture. Various aspects of villas had already been treated, but Dr. Branigan followed with a paper devoted to their Rise and Fall. Most interesting perhaps, was the evidence accumulating from recent work of the survival of the villas, or at least occupation on villa sites, into the Dark Ages. This theme was also tackled by Mr. Stevens, who cited documentary and legal evidence for sociological continuity and the survival of the Celtic tradition through the Roman period.

Mr. T. Champion had the unenviable task of summing up: he pointed to some assumptions which could be questioned and some subjects which could be illuminated, and so concluded an interesting and useful conference.

MARY OLIVER

#### EVOLUTION OF THE LANDSCAPE

Our February lecture on Thursday 28th is by H.C.(Collin) Bowen of the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments. He is a specialist in archaeological field surveying, including air photography, and has devoted many years' work to the examination of our countryside from the ground and above simply looking for and identifying archaeological features such as ancient farms, field systems and crop marks. His book 'Ancient Fields', there is a copy in Basingstoke Library, has become a classic. It was written to promote study of our landscape in the belief that ancient fields are important and we do not know enough about them. When one realises at what an astonishing rate they are disappearing under urban development, the significance of Collin Bowen's work is unquestionable. Hamicks bookshop have kindly arranged a book display to coincide with this lecture.

#### THE NORMAN PERIOD IN HAMPSHIRE

Together with the Hampshire Field Club we have organised a special Saturday afternoon lecture on March 15th. Michael Hughes, Archaeological Survey Officer of the Hampshire Archaeological Committee will be speaking on the Norman Period in Hampshire. Because it is a Saturday afternoon and a lecture on a general interest topic it is expected to attract a large audience from all age groups. The meeting will be given wide publicity and other local historical and archaeological societies will be invited to attend. As usual, admission will be free and tea, sandwiches and cakes will be on sale.

Note: this meeting will be held at Church Cottage.

#### POTTERY FIND AT SILCHESTER 5th January 1975

Duncan Russell's interest in Silchester is well-known to us all. Shortly after Christmas his field walking activities were rewarded by the discovery of a concentration of reddish, gritted pot sherds in a narrow strip of land at the edge of a field just ploughed for the first time in recent years. He immediately informed Reading Museum, and the Director, Mr. Gwatkin came out to see the find, and asked that we organise its excavation.

Alas for him, Duncan was committed to work on the next day so some of us stood in for him and carried out a rapid rescue dig.

The pottery was found in two main groups, one on the surface and the other beside it, below the ploughsoil, in its original position in a shallow depression dug into the natural gravel. Most of the sherds appeared to be from one pot, but as many of the breaks were old ones, even in the undisturbed group, it had presumably been broken when discarded or by some subsequent ploughing. A sample of the clayey earth contained in the pot was taken in the hopes that it may reveal something useful. The Reading Museum staff have not yet had time to process the pottery and confirm or deny our first impression that it was a crude, large vessel of Belgic date. They are hoping it will reconstruct sufficiently to be displayed in the site museum at Silchester.

MARY OLIVER

PAMBER PRIORY

We have just received scant information on a forthcoming emergency dig at the site of Pamber Priory (SU 609582) believed to be taking place at weekends at the end of March. Excavations will be directed by Michael Hughes (above) and he needs volunteers. More information when available.

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