



BASINGSTOKE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Newsletter

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CALENDAR:

Sunday 30th May - Tuesday 1st June:: Further Excavations at Viables Farm.

Saturday 26th June Conducted walk around Farnham.

Thursday 1st July Annual General Meeting

Saturday 10th July Summer excursion to Surrey (Abinger and
Clandon Park, etc.)

Digging at Viables Farm every weekend throughout June, 10.00 a.m. - 5.00 p.m.

Membership Renewal

The Society's year begins in May which means that annual subscriptions now fall due. For the first time since we began in 1971 we are forced to raise our subscription rates at all levels. While we realise that this will inevitably upset some members we feel that you will understand that unless we increase our revenue we will not meet our expenditure, particularly on postage and stationery during the coming year.

Subscription rates for 1976/77 will be as follows:-

Adults £1.50 Joint Membership £2.25

Pensioners and Students 75p

Affiliated Society Membership £2.00

Cheques and postal orders should be made payable to the Basingstoke Archaeological Society and should be sent or given to our Hon. Treasurer, Miss Joy Needham, Chineham Farm Cottages, Shakespeare Road, Basingstoke, or to any other officer or Committee member.

We sincerely hope that you will all renew your membership for another year. Already we have some exciting plans for forthcoming events with another varied and interesting lecture programme taking shape. If all goes well we should have at least one special star attraction whose fame extends well beyond Basingstoke.

English Cottages and Small Farmhouses Exhibition

In conjunction with the Arts Council, Basingstoke District Council Planning Department have mounted a small but splendid exhibition on English cottages and farmhouses at the Central Library, Basingstoke. The exhibition, which consists of display boards, very professionally presented with text and photographs, will be on view until Saturday 28th May. Library opening times are 10.00 a.m. - 7.00 p.m. Monday - Wednesday and Friday; 10.00 a.m. - 1.00 p.m. Thursday; 10.00 a.m. - 5.00 p.m. Saturday.

Viabes Farm Excavation 1976

Our summer digging season begins on the Spring Bank Holiday weekend. Duncan Russell will be directing operations from Sunday to Tuesday inclusive and then every weekend throughout June. We have been fortunate in finding a friendly contractor to clear up the well-head with a machine so that a complete drawing could be made. Considerable quantities of 1st and 2nd century Roman pottery were recovered and a bronze brooch. Because of it being a potential hazard the well has been filled and will not be properly excavated. Duncan hopes to explore further ditch alignments and, if the contractor's friendship has not been exhausted, to clear an area of topsoil from the inner part of the site in an attempt to expose settlement evidence.

Already the site has yielded much Roman and Iron Age material, doubtless there is more to come. Given fine weather we should enjoy something of a holiday atmosphere with free suntans thrown in. Once again you are all welcome to participate.

Visit to Farnham

Last Autumn we planned to make an afternoon visit to Farnham when the Museum curator, Mr. Ashton Booth, had arranged to lead a conducted tour of the many interesting streets and buildings, giving us a potted history of the town as we went. Unfortunately the date chosen seemed to clash with several other events and we were unable to muster sufficient people to make the visit worth Mr. Booth giving up a valuable Saturday afternoon, so it was postponed.

In the hope that we can manage a better turn-out we have arranged to hold this meeting on Saturday 26th June. The tour should take approximately 1½ - 2 hours, to be followed by tea at the Museum at nominal cost.

Further details will be circulated later.

Mike Hughes to leave HAC

From the 1st June Mike Hughes is to give up his post as the first Field Survey Officer for the Hampshire Archaeological Committee. He is to become the first County Planning Archaeologist. The new post, in many ways similar to his present one, will entail working closely with the County Council Planning Department and other Departments on all aspects of the archaeological and historical landscape, carrying out surveys. He will liaise with the various archaeological bodies in Hampshire at all levels and with national bodies. One of his objectives is to help set up a Hampshire Sites, Monuments and Buildings Record in conjunction with the County Museum Service. He has already been active in this particular direction while working for HAC. Mike's new post will be based in the Environmental Section of the Planning Department under the Assistant County Planning Officer.

Fortunately for everyone Mike is staying in Hampshire, but he will undoubtedly be missed on HAC where his drive, enthusiasm and boundless energy, together with his contacts with the 'right' people, have established him with a sound reputation: the envy of many other county archaeological committees. We wish him every success in his new post.

Butser, Survival and the BBC

Members of this Society who attended the WEA classes given by Peter Reynolds last year will remember that the BBC was then showing interest in filming a series of programmes at Butser Hill. The idea is now very much alive. Advertisements have begun to circulate for volunteers to drop out of the twentieth century and take part in a year-long project when they will live, as far as possible, the lives of Iron Age people. What the BBC is proposing to do is to arrange for a small community of people to build and then actually inhabit a farm similar to the one established by Peter Reynolds and his archaeologists, already at Butser Hill, on which they would eat, sleep and survive for a full twelve months. The aim is for the volunteers to wear the clothes, use the tools, make the pottery and eat the food appropriate to the period so that for the duration of the 'experiment' they will live as Iron Age people. According to the BBC the whole project will be under careful medical supervision. Food supplies will be imported as needed and there will be expeditions off site at fairly frequent intervals to obtain necessary materials - to cut timber, to fish, to evaporate salt, to go hunting(!)

This experiment will eventually be the subject of 12 documentary programmes. Volunteers will receive a modest fee for each programme and a bonus of several hundred pounds for staying the course. 'Volunteers looking for a way of making money' say the BBC, 'would do better to take a job in a factory.' There will be training sessions for likely candidates later this year and those finally chosen to take part will move onto the project some time next year, probably February. Because of the highly practical nature of the project the BBC has pointed out that people with little or no formal education, who are skilled with their hands, are likely to be more suitable than the most knowledgeable academics. Any volunteers?

Roman Planes

Richard Rushent-Oram recently came across the following extract from the journal 'Planecraft' dated 1934 which he thinks will be of general interest.

'Evidence exists that the Romans in the early centuries of Christianity were expert woodworkers. Also that they were well acquainted with the use of the plane.

Recent excavations have thrown more light on many of their tools than we hitherto possessed.

In the main, the Roman plane was of the wooden variety, but there is evidence that they had experimented with metal planes, and of these, perhaps the most interesting is the one in Reading Museum. Found at the bottom of a well a few years ago at Silchester, it has been authoritatively dated at a period earlier than the 4th century AD. Its appearance suggests an amazing likeness to the ultimate form the modern iron plane has assumed. There are no side channels or grooves for the cutting iron, but two cross rivets suggest that a wooden wedge was used to hold it. The plane is $13\frac{1}{4}$ ins. long x $2\frac{1}{4}$ ins. wide. The blade held at 65° was $4\frac{1}{4}$ ins. long. The few wooden parts of the plane have long since decayed away.'

At Viabes Farm in 1973 a pair of dividers was discovered which have been authoritatively dated as Roman, and form the motif on our stationery. Duncan Russell and his diggers might keep their eyes open for a plane too!

Changes at the Willis Museum

Members may be interested to hear that the Archaeology Department of the County Museum Service is transferring its centre of operations to the Willis Museum, Basingstoke. This is part of a new policy in which the Subject Keepers of the Service are being based out to their constituent Museums rather than making regular visits from Headquarters at Chilcomb House. The intention is to bring back more life to constituent Museums.

At Alton, Simon Davey, Keeper of Biology has now taken up full time residence and John Lavender, Keeper of Geology, is once more based at Christchurch.

Headquarters offer service as a whole and the main technical services will remain at Chilcomb House, Winchester.

The transfer to the Willis Museum is not yet complete. Here the annex at the back, well known to the Society (from pot washing activities), is being converted to form the Headquarters of the Archaeological Department. The Keeper/Curator is already installed in an office in one of the two work rooms formerly used by the Society. We are most grateful to the Society for so readily giving up their use of this room and at a time when you are known to be under great pressure as regards publication and post-excavation work. It is hoped that the remaining work room will soon be provided with more benching and storage racking so that the space available will still be sufficient for your purposes.

The entrance lobby is being enlarged to take in the room immediately to its north and this will become a study area where ordnance survey maps and records may be consulted as well, it is hoped, as a selection of books from the Service's Archaeological Library. The remaining space is being converted to take extra storage racking: this will house the Service's Archaeological Collections from Basingstoke, East Hampshire and Rushmoor and Hart Districts. Archaeological collections from other Districts within the County are being kept in storage at Headquarters at Chilcomb House. Reasons of space will not allow their storage at Basingstoke and they will in this way, be kept closer to their area of origin. The first and major stage in the erection of the storage racking to take these Collections has now been completed and it is hoped that within a short space of time the work will be finished.

Members of the Society will, of course, be most welcome to come both to see and discuss the changes which are taking place. I would also add that there is a great deal of work to be done on the Collections, particularly with regard to the marking of finds, the labelling of boxes and any Members at all interested in undertaking day time voluntary work of this nature will be most welcome indeed.

ALAN BURCHARD
Keeper of Archaeology
HCMS

What's in a name

More or less from the time of formation of this Society - 1971 - the Committee has wondered whether we should alter our name to appeal to a wider audience and become the Basingstoke Historical and Archaeological Society.

From the outset our interests have been sufficiently wide to encompass historical matters in addition to pure archaeology, but to the outsider our name may act as a deterrent. Once an overture has been made to the Society a prospective member would immediately be clear from our membership literature that our interests are diverse and historically orientated: but what of those who don't actually contact us?

Do you have any views on this? The Committee would like to hear how you feel about the name of your Society. Would you oppose a change or welcome it?