



BASINGSTOKE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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CALENDAR

Thursday 28th April 'Excavations at Silchester 1974-76'

Lecture by Dr. M. Fulford, Department of History,
University of Reading, to be held at Chute House,
Basingstoke, at 7.30 p.m.

Saturday 30th April Hampshire Field Club. One Day Conference and
Annual General Meeting, to be held at Hursley Park,
Hursley. 9.30 a.m. - 6.00 p.m.

EXCAVATIONS AT SILCHESTER 1974-76

Excavations have taken place at the site of the Roman town of Silchester (Calleva Atrebatum) since the end of the last century but despite the wealth of information they have given us there are always new questions posed which require answers. For our last lecture in the current series we have invited Dr. Mike Fulford of the University of Reading to discuss his recent work inside the walls at Silchester which he has undertaken with specific problems to solve.

Dr. Fulford is an authority on Roman and pre-Roman archaeology and it was to him that we turned for the expert analysis of the pottery from our own excavations at Ructstalls Hill.

His research at Silchester has also involved a large amount of field walking and with a few other people, notably our own Society member Duncan Russell, he formed the Calleva Field Survey Group principally to examine the extent of extra-mural activity in Roman times.

Dr. Fulford's lecture will be given in the Clennell Room (first floor), Chute House (bottom of Church Street) on Thursday 28th April at 7.30 p.m.

Silchester is arguably Hampshire's most important archaeological monument and, being so close to Basingstoke, cannot have escaped the notice of any member of this Society. However, apart from what remains of the city walls, and the small site museum, there is very little to see at the site. There is of course a fine display of the excavated material in Reading Museum, but nothing in Basingstoke.

Needless to say the Hampshire County Museum Service (HCMS) are concerned by this state of affairs and are anxious that the site should become Hampshire orientated rather than towards Berkshire. Mr. K. Barton, Director of the HCMS is on record as saying that if any of the finds could be brought into their custody they would come to Basingstoke rather than Winchester. Should this ever happen it would meet with our obvious approval, but a great deal of lengthy negotiation and argument would necessarily precede it.

Of more immediate concern within the county is the site itself. The Hampshire Archaeological Committee (HAC) has devoted discussion time to the Silchester question on several occasions over the past few years. Mike Hughes, HAC's previous Field Survey Officer, concerned himself particularly with scheduling - the process by which an ancient monument receives statutory protection - suggesting that the area outside the walls, including the two Roman suburbs should be protected. It was not till negotiations for this extra-mural area were taking place that it was discovered that the intra-mural area was not protected as a scheduled ancient monument. Although the papers had been prepared the necessary enactment had never taken place. Because of this oversight the intra-mural area of Silchester did not become scheduled officially till 17th March 1976! The extra-mural area, to the limits of the outer earthwork is expected to become scheduled also.

Ploughing is now Silchester's biggest threat, both inside and outside the walls. Because it is, and was previously believed to be, a scheduled site, farmers are currently not permitted to plough to a depth greater than nine inches. But ownership and tenancy have changed frequently, possibly even annually. It has, therefore, been difficult to control farmers and monitor the depths being ploughed. It is believed that destruction is already taking place by ploughing to depths greater than nine inches.

One answer would be to have preservation orders drawn up by which ploughing could be stopped altogether, but the solution which would please the archaeological world most is for the Department of the Environment to buy Silchester for the nation - like Wroxeter which was bought in recent years - and for the Department of the Environment and/or Basingstoke District Council to become the Guardians. Guardianship is the only adequate preservation possible and, because of Silchester's geographical location, it would automatically be thought of as a Hampshire site. It is believed that already negotiations concerning guardianship have taken place and that senior officers of Basingstoke District have shown great interest in the prospect.

As always, the overriding factor is money with which to buy the site. Despite the present period of financial recession it is to be hoped that sufficient money can be raised to preserve this important monument for ever and so prevent any further destruction.

EXCAVATIONS AT ALTON 1977

Easter weekend saw the deadline for the current excavations at Alton, directed by Martin Millett. The site, threatened by redevelopment, was on the corner of the High Street and Market Street, smack in the middle of the oldest part of this ancient Hampshire market town. Being in such an important position in the commercial centre the site, not surprisingly, has been largely occupied by shops, the current ones dating from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Martin's diggers had to hack their way through the shop floors before beginning digging which when removed enabled the walls and foundations of a succession of earlier buildings to be revealed. An almost complete sequence of medieval structures came to light with a sprinkling of Saxon and Roman pottery sherds to take the story back even earlier. Several medieval wooden sleeper beams were recovered and samples taken for tree-ring dating by the University of Sheffield. Because of this good fortune very precise dating can be expected.

Because the site was in the town's busiest part and behind shop windows, the excavation was on show to the town's people for the duration and provided a major source of interest. Shops whose floors did not have to come up were used to display the finds.

CHINEHAM DISTRICT DRAFT PLAN

Basingstoke District Council have just (April 1st) published their Draft Proposals for the Chineham Development. They have sent the Society a copy for comment.

Section Eleven, headed Archaeology and Conservation, briefly describes the archaeological problems and suggests areas to be preserved, excavated or incorporated into conservation areas. Excavation is recommended at Cowdrays Down. For those known sites which inevitably will be destroyed it is recognised that it is vital that observers are present in the early stages of the construction work to record archaeological finds and features as they are revealed or disturbed. In this context the Draft Plan states: "It is hoped that most of this work will be carried out by the Hampshire County Museum Service with the assistance of the Basingstoke Archaeological Society." The implication here of course is: if we don't, nobody else will!

"House building is expected to begin early in 1978 in the vicinity of Swing Swang Lane and progress northwards towards Daneshill House. This area is expected to be substantially developed within the first five years of the Plan."

"House building in Chineham North is also expected to start early in 1978 on the land to the north of the existing Reading Road and the east of Cufaude Lane. This is expected to progress northwards and westwards and most of the area to the south of Pettys Brook is expected to be substantially developed by the end of the 1980's."

Alan Burchard is hoping to begin work on Cowdrays Down, probably in the third week of September, when as much digging support as we can muster will be urgently needed: please note!

Copies of the Draft Chineham District Plan: Written Statement may be obtained from The Director of Planning, Basingstoke District Council and also from the Public Library, price £1.00.

SARSEN STONE SURVEY

The Sarsen Survey continues and the list of these durable sandstone and flint boulders in Hampshire has now grown to 215 separate stones or groups, about 450 stones in all. One garden at Winchester contains 99! Tally cards will be held by the Society of Antiquaries and locally at the County Planning Department. Reports to date show concentrations in the Winchester - Twyford area, as well as Hayling Island, northwest of Andover and around the Candovers. Gaps appear north of Basingstoke and around Alton. An interesting recent find of our own is a pile of 14 stones near north Oakley (OS 538536), possibly illustrating the theory that the name derives from the Saxon Sar-Stan, or troublesome stone, referring to stones that had to be cleared out of the way for agricultural purposes.

A variety of uses of sarsen have been noted, such as horse-mounting blocks, marking stones for tracks or boundaries, tombstones and as part of the fabric of churches or churchyard walls. They are associated with periods ranging from the Mesolithic to Norman and, not surprisingly for items of this type and antiquity, certain stones are endowed in local legend with the ability to vanish or move themselves.

A full report of the Survey to date can be found in the current issue of the Hampshire Field Club Newsletter (No. 5. Jan. 1977). It is intended that logging should continue for some time yet - so possible sarsens should still be reported to myself at 8 Eastfield Avenue (Tel. 22029).

TONY ROBSON

MARC 3

On Sunday 20th March Peter Heath joined Tim Schadla-Hall's diploma course group from Camberley on a visit to the MARC 3 headquarters where the Director, Peter Fasham, talked to them about the excavation and site recording techniques employed. Afterwards they were shown over the current excavations on Winnall Down close to Kings Worthy. Peter has contributed the following note on his visit:

A visit to Hinton House, Kings Worthy, headquarters of the Motorway Archaeological Rescue Committee, led to an interesting afternoon there, being introduced to 'Stratigraphical Units' and looking at the excavations on Winnall Down.

Each Stratigraphical Unit (SU) represents a feature, layer or item and is allocated a number, in sequence, as it is uncovered; small finds and environmental samples are recorded as a separate series. An SU is a separate entity and does not, necessarily relate to the previous or to the following SU. However, this is no disadvantage as all the information is fed into a computer and may be readily retrieved. Already nearly one million items have been recorded for MARC 3 sites.

On site, supervisors complete a standard form to record each feature so that the information gained is presented and fed to the computer in the same format; after entry a print-out is produced which is checked for accuracy. Information can be extracted from the computer records in various ways, e.g. if the relative frequency of flint implements of a particular size is required a print-out can be obtained giving this information numerically or presenting it as a 'bar chart', which can be read at a glance.

Winnall Down is approximately 60m x 60m (slightly smaller than Ructstalls Hill) and from quite a shallow area over 15000 SU's have been recorded. There are some late Bronze Age finds but in the main the site is Iron Age with a distinctive outer ditch and evidence of post supported ramparts. There have been several phases of occupation as shown by alterations to the entrance way. The site will be back-filled by April 18th but excavation will continue outside the main ditch under the present spoil heaps with some hope of uncovering later period works.

PETER HEATH

EXCURSIONS 1977

Preliminary arrangements are being made for summer coach excursions to the Weald and Downland Museum at Singleton combined with a visit to the Roman palace at Fishbourne on June 18th. It is also intended to visit sites and monuments in Dorset later in the summer, with a possible extra visit to an operational excavation.

NEWS AND NOTES

Congratulations to Edward Besly on his appointment to the British Museum, Department of Numismatics. While reading classics at Oxford he was fortunate to work in the same department during his vacations. He has developed a keen interest in coins, particularly of the Roman Empire, over several years. While we may envy this opportunity to combine his work with his hobby we wish him every success in a highly competitive and scholarly field.

Somewhat belatedly we must also extend our congratulations and best wishes to Nigel Bell who flew out to Mexico in January. He is to spend the next two or three years looking after Shell's operations there. When not working he hopes to continue his documentary studies on the history of Newnham and neighbouring parishes, but at the same time he will be soaking up some of the ancient Aztec culture.

Don't forget the British Museum's spectacular exhibition 'Wealth of the Roman World Gold and Silver AD300-700' which lasts to the 1st October. The theme of the exhibition, demonstrated by an assemblage of some 600 objects of gold and silver, is the change from the one world power of Rome to the

emergence of three world powers: Islam, the Byzantine Empire and the Germanic Kingdoms of Europe. This is the period during which Europe became Christian and the Near East became Muslim. The exhibition includes items of jewellery and plate, coins and medals. Of special interest, shown for the first time since it was found in 1975, is the hoard of Christian silver plate with Christian inscriptions from Water Newton near Peterborough. The exhibition opens: Monday 2-5 p.m., Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday 10 a.m. - 5 p.m., Thursday 10 a.m. - 9 p.m., Sunday 2.30 - 6 p.m. Admission 50p.

Another exhibition in London, this time a permanent one, is at the newly opened Museum of London in London Wall, close to St. Paul's Cathedral. Here you can see a unique display entirely devoted to London, its origins and history. Exhibits include: sculptures from the Roman Temple of Mithras; a Roman bikini; the Great Fire; an 18th century debtors' prison; a barber's shop from Islington; the Lord Mayor's coach; and numerous others, with royal relics and treasures from the City. The Museum of London is open from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesday to Saturday and from 2 - 6 p.m. on Sunday.

At a recent inaugural meeting in Farnborough was formed the Hampshire, Berkshire and Surrey Ceramic Study Group. Their objects will be to research and discuss the problems of the pottery industries, notably Roman and Medieval, in the border area.

The latest information to hand on the results from the excavations by the Department of the Environment Central Excavation Unit at Winklebury Camp last year is that the material has been handed over to the Hampshire County Museum Service and publication will be in the annual volume of the Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society, 1977.
