



BASINGSTOKE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Newsletter

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CALENDAR

Thursday 5th June	Conducted tour of Odiham meet 7.30 p.m. - The Bury, Odiham
Saturday 14th June-6th July	Excavation at Cowdery's Down Basing
Saturday 21st June	WEA excursion to Chilton and Vale of Aylesbury (details inside)
Saturday 28th June	Excursion to St Albans Details on separate leaflet.
Thursday 3rd July	Society AGM 7.30 p.m. Chute House.
Saturday 5th July-3rd August	Excavation at Basing House

MEGALITHIC ASTRONOMY AND SOCIETY

At the end of March I attended a weekend conference at Newcastle upon Tyne on Megalithic Astronomy and Society. It attracted just over 100 participants, ranging from extra-mural students to university - and dirt-archaeologists, with an astronomer from the Royal Observatory to get the astronomy right. It was soon clear that megalithic astronomy is still a controversial subject and, though everyone remained polite, one or two stringent remarks were made about some aspects of research.

Dr Archie Thom (recognisable by his accent and his kilt) stoutly defended the work of his father and himself. Everyone paid tribute to the essential part the Thoms have played in making this aspect of megalithic archaeology respectable, but many speakers found fault with details of their interpretation and with their claims for accurate alignments of monuments on specific movements of the sun, moon or stars. Dr Clive Ruggles is undertaking a thorough reassessment of 'lunar observatories' based on the statistical analysis of fuller data independent of that collected by the Thoms. He gave a splendid one-man performance of a lively argument between a pro-Thom and an anti-Thom professor, and his analysis promises to be as objective and clear as can be expected.

I was completely lost in R. Freer's lecture on 'a possible geometrical construction of the Kerlescan Alignment in Carnac' - it seemed to me that paper and pencil would have been essential tools for that job! - and I felt that John Patrick's new methodology for analysing megaliths (a paper admirably presented on his behalf by Douglas Heggie) was trying hard to express in mathematical terms a truism that could be expressed just as well in words. Gordon Moir suggested that astronomical interpretations of megalithic sites could sometimes be faulted on astronomical grounds, and Aubrey Burl argued that monuments should be considered not in isolation but in the context of other similar monuments, following this up with an account of recumbent stone circles, a closed group of monuments in the North and East of Scotland. J. Scott gave a clear and full account of the excavation of the Temple Wood Stone Circle in Argyll, and Gerald and Margaret Ponting reported on their mammoth surveying task on Callanish (do you remember the 1979 Chronicle finals?)

Although the arguments about astronomical interpretations were lively (and enjoyable), what I had particularly hoped to get from the conference was some sense of what is being thought now about the society behind all this. Colin Burgess produced a new chronological framework to cover the period of megalithic monuments (instead of talking about early, middle, late etc. Neolithic and Bronze Age, he proposed periods named after type site) and this was well summed up by Dr Patrick Ashmore (Department of the Environment) as 'a good working hypothesis but not revealed truth'. I shall look forward to Colin Burgess's forthcoming book

The Age of Stonehenge to be published by Dent. The title of Euan MacKie's paper, 'Wise Men in Antiquity' was promising, but I felt he evaded some basic questions, spending half his time defending his work at Kintraw where he claims to have found a man-made platform from which observations were conducted. This produced from two members of the audience an unexpected challenge to the validity of the soil analysis on which this interpretation rests. Alastair Whittle's paper on 'The Organisation of Society in the Later Neolithic' at last tackled the social background I was hoping for, mainly in terms of rank and redistribution, but here again the major message seemed to be a need for more work to be done.

Well, what are people thinking then? Some are claiming a very sophisticated level of astronomy based on accurate alignments and considerable geometrical knowledge, but most of the speakers would accept simply that certain sites had particular orientations which might have had some 'scientific' value but almost certainly had some religious, symbolic value. I think there is a general feeling that the arrival of beakers doesn't necessarily mean the arrival of actual 'Beaker Folk' but more probably a widening of social contacts - 'ideas move rather than people'.

The proceedings of the conference are to be published as one of the British Archaeological Reports (obtainable from B.A.R., 122 Banbury Road, Oxford OX2 7BP), probably some time in the autumn.

BARBARA APPLIN

FOOD, FORUM, AND FUN

I think everyone will agree that the Food, Forum and Fun evening was an unqualified success from all aspects. From a social aspect it brought together several Societies and Clubs with a common interest, as an advertisement for our own Society it whetted the appetite of potential members and financially we should show a profit of £150. The organizing sub-committee would like to record their thanks to the host of helpers and to everyone who sold prize draw tickets. Details of the lucky winners are as follows:-

	<u>Ticket No.</u>	<u>Name</u>
First Prize £30	3139	A. Drury, Basingstoke.
Second Prize £15	3462	Mrs J. Shaw, Basingstoke.
Third Prize £ 5	2050	K. Hedderley, Oakley.
Other Prizes	0478	Mrs P. Walker, Wenbley
	1699	Mrs B. Sallows, Basingstoke
	1722	Mrs A. Harvey, Reading
	1922	Mr M. French, Basingstoke
	3381	Mr C. Howard, Road Research Laboratory
	2142	Receptionist, Macmillan Ltd.
	0092	Mr Webb, Salisbury
	3388	Mrs P. Drury, Basingstoke
	0519	Mrs A. Woodnott, Basingstoke
	0119	Mr R. Tapping, Basingstoke
	1213	Mr J. F. Smith, Basingstoke
	0298	Mrs E. Close, Baughurst.

Alan Roach.

On behalf of the Committee the Newsletter editor would also like to express the Society's thanks to Alan Roach and all who worked so hard on the sub-committee to organise such a successful and enjoyable evening.

ADVERTISEMENT

SEN BOOKS (Sarah and Andrew Duckworth). 'Greenways', 177 Pack Lane, Kempshott. Telephone Basingstoke 22904.

We offer below some books from our shelves which may be of interest to members:

- 1) Richard Jefferies
- a) THE OPEN AIR. Lutterworth Press. 1948. Beautifully illustrated with wood-engravings by Agnes Miller Parker. In original green cloth. A characteristic title. Much interest for the lover of nature and English country life. Spine dull, otherwise VERY GOOD £3.50.
- b) WILD LIFE IN A SOUTHERN COUNTY. Nelson. Quoted by our lecturer last month. Covers rubbed and spine faded, but a GOOD reading copy. £2.75.
- 2) Three early Pelican paperbacks, all VERY GOOD CONDITION.
- a) S. E. Winbolt. BRITAIN B.C. 1945. A survey from the early Old Stone Age to the early Iron Age. The author was a practising archaeologist in the 1920's £1.00
- b) J.E.S. Edwards, F.S.A. THE PYRAMIDS OF EGYPT. 1949. A well-written and illustrated survey of the Pyramids by a practising archaeologist of the 1930's. £1.00
- c) Sir Leonard Woolley. A FORGOTTEN KINGDOM. 1953. The excavations of Atchana and Mina in the Turkish Hatay. Illustrated. (3000-1200 B.C.). £1.00
- 3) Graham Clark. ARCHAEOLOGY AND SOCIETY. Methuen. 1939. The chapter headings- Discovery, Preservation, Excavation, Chronology and Interpretation, indicate the pattern of the text. Well illustrated and most readable. VERY GOOD £4.00
- 4) Jane Oliver. THE ANCIENT ROADS OF ENGLAND Cassell. 1949 Green Roads, Roman Roads, Saxon Roads, etc. Popularly written, illustrated, a GOOD copy £1.50
- 5) Margaret Murray. MY FIRST HUNDRED YEARS Kimber. 1963. The autobiography of one of our great archaeologists who was a student in 1894. and pioneered the entry of women into the profession. VERY GOOD £4.00

TRAINING EXCAVATION AT VIABLES FARM

At our last AGM a plea was made for basic training in archaeological techniques so that members attending future digs in the area would be confident of their ability to excavate. With Cowdery's Down and Basing House excavations coming up later this summer it was decided to offer a training course at Viables Farm over the Easter weekend. An intensive programme was put together by Peggy Drury, Peter Heath and myself designed to teach participants a variety of essential techniques.

Although the weather was cold it was mostly sunny and an encouraging number of people of all ages came along; on the Sunday afternoon we had nineteen volunteers for training. Archaeologically it was perhaps a disappointing weekend, but from the training point of view it was highly successful. Everyone seemed to enjoy themselves despite the hard work and applied themselves willingly to the entire programme.

We began at the beginning by explaining what was known about the Viables Farm site already from previous excavations and from surveys above ground, using an approximate sketch plan of the site. Martin Millett, who is to write up the previous excavation in conjunction with his current work at Cowdery's Down, suggested we should open a trench running east-west which, from survey evidence was expected to reveal two ditches, running approximately north-south, on either side of a driveway. This we did. A trench 11m x 1m was cut and topsoil removed down to the natural chalk subsoil to a depth of about $\frac{1}{2}$ m. We were continually hampered by some particularly nasty treeroots which, but for Andrew Duckworth's saw, might have defeated us. Subsequent stiff and aching muscles and joints bore witness to the effort involved.

Instruction was given in how to survey and lay out the trench in its required position, how to remove the turf and stack it for reuse after back-filling, and how to remove the topsoil into properly constructed, orderly spoil heaps. These activities are so often forgotten when sites are stripped by mechanical means.

After the subsoil surface had been thoroughly scraped with trowels two archaeological features became immediately obvious as dark patches in the surrounding white chalk. The easterly ditch showed up at one end and what appeared to be the butt end of the second ditch at the other. Practice was gained in plotting, measuring and drawing both features, although neither was completely uncovered because, as always, it seems, part lay under the earth beyond the limits of our trench.

Fragments of Romano-British pottery, some tile and brick, and pieces of animal bone and teeth were recovered from the topsoil throughout the entire length of the trench, together with numerous burnt flints (pot-boilers) and a handful of convincing-looking flint flakes.

Unfortunately through lack of time neither feature could be excavated because it would have required opening up a little more of the trench so that each could be seen more clearly.

Additional trowelling experience was made possible by returning to the site of the previous excavation where large areas stripped of topsoil had been left open. Also, by bringing some bags of pottery from another site, we were able to introduce a few people to pot washing.

All in all the weekend proved thoroughly worthwhile and could be repeated as an annual event if the demand were sufficient to warrant it.

RICHARD SEARLE

Postscript

Over the May Day Bank Holiday weekend a small group (mostly schoolboys) returned to Viables Farm, and our trench was extended to reveal the edges of the two

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features uncovered at Easter. The easterly ditch was excavated and found to cut across an earlier pit which we plotted but did not excavate.

The westerly feature when fully revealed looked at first like a grave and not a north-south ditch as was expected, since it was only just over $\frac{1}{2}$ m wide. Any excitement at the prospect of finding a skeleton, however, was quickly dashed when this feature was found to be no more than 8cm deep. Thus we had found the butt end of a ditch, but one running from east to west and remarkably shallow. Where the westerly, north-south ditch we originally set out to find might be, must wait for another training dig!

NOTES AND NEWS

Archaeological equipment - The Committee are trying to complete an inventory of all the equipment owned by the Society for insurance purposes. In the days before our equipment was stored centrally at the museum we depended on kind members looking after various items at home. We think we have traced everything, but if any member still has an odd shovel at the back of the garage, we should be pleased to hear about it. Please ring Basingstoke 24263.

Evening excursion to Odiham - Please note that the date given for this excursion has been changed to Thursday 5th June, we meet in the Bury at 7.30 and Mr Spruce will guide us round the interesting points of Odiham. It is expected that the tour will last about one hour.

HFC summer programme - The Field Club summer programme has a number of items of archaeological interest in addition to those already mentioned which some members may be interested in attending.

Thursday 29th May: Lecture on Neatham and other settlements in the Alton area by M. Millett, Director of Neatham excavation 7.30 p.m. Allen Gallery, Alton.

Saturday 7th June: Field Trip of Saxon Churches, including Corhampton, Boarhunt and Titchfield by R. Whinney of the Winchester City Rescue Archaeologist's Office. Leave cars in official car park behind Corhampton Church. 2.p.m. sharp.

Subscriptions - Will members please note that subscriptions for 1980/81 are now due. It will be appreciated if they can be paid as promptly as possible.

AGM - The Society's AGM will be held on Thursday 3rd July at 7.30 p.m. at Chute House. The committee for the next year will be selected, a review of the year's activities given. This is your opportunity to raise any matter for discussion. Please support this meeting.

WEA excursion - The WEA are organising a coach trip on Saturday 21st June to visit Waddesdon Manor near Aylesbury built by Baron de Rothschild in the style of a French Renaissance Chateau at the end of the last century. There will be an early lunch stop at the Aston Rouant Nature Reserve (NB bring a packed lunch) and a chance to walk the Beacon Hill Escarpment Trail: Return via Aylesbury.

The fare will be £2 for adults, £1.50p for children with £1.30 entrance fee for the house, grounds and aviary at Waddesdon Manor (free to National Trust members). Anyone wanting to reserve seats for this excursion please ring Mr Herrington 22090 (evenings) by May 30th.

ADVERTISEMENT continued:-

- 6) Charles Cox and Charles Bradley, THE PARISH CHURCHES OF ENGLAND. Batsford 1946
Well written and illustrated. FINE in original paper wraps. £1.25
- 7) British Regional Geology. THE HAMPSHIRE BASIN AND ADJOINING AREAS H.M.S.O
1960. Excellent on fossils and well illustrated. FINE in original paper wraps. £1.25
- 8) AN ACT FOR VESTING THE SETTLED ESTATE OF EDMUND BRAMPTON ETC, 1755.
His wife was the daughter of Charles Withers, Her sister was Ann, who married William Beach. Properties in Deane, Oakley, Sherborne, St. Lawrence Wootton, Branley, Pamber, Tadley, Stratfield Saye, etc are listed. Of considerable local history interest. 19 pages, folio, disbound, in VERY GOOD condition £6.00
- 9) THE SUTTON HOO SHIP BURIAL British Museum Trustees. 1947. A 'provisional' guide. 62 pages. Well illustrated and with plans. VERY GOOD in decorated wraps. £3.75