



# BASINGSTOKE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Newsletter

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CALENDAR

Thursday 29th January	'Recent Excavations at Newbury' Mr Alan Vince, Chute House, Basingstoke, 7.30 p.m.
Wednesday 11th February	'The defences of Rome' by Professor Malcolm Todd Lecture Theatre A, Physics Building, Southampton University, 7.30 p.m. Tickets £1
Monday 16th February	BIAG Meeting, 'The Basingstoke Canal' by Mr Ted Williams of S.H.C.S., SEB clubroom, Bounty Road, Basingstoke, 7.30 p.m.
Wednesday 18th February	'Experimental Archaeology' by Dr p Reynolds, H.F.C. and Alton Archaeological Society, Allen Gallery, Alton. 7.30 p.m.

## Recent Excavations in Newbury

Our first lecture of 1981 is a talk by Mr Alan Vince about his excavations in Newbury town centre, which explored the history of some medieval burgage plots. Burgage plots were the tenurial holdings of the burgesses in a medieval town. Newbury is a near neighbour of Basingstoke, known to us all to a greater or lesser degree and with a broadly similar history until very recently. The rapid wholesale development of the Basingstoke Town centre in the 1960's, with no access for archaeologists to see what lay below the old buildings of Church Street, Potters Lane, Bedford Place and the rest, means that many of Basingstoke's burgage plots are lost to us. A few sites in Basingstoke (e.g. the Co-op site) have given us a tantalising glimpse of the busy medieval town we know from documentary sources. It will be interesting to see what the careful excavation of a central site can add to the knowledge of a similar near neighbour in the early middle ages.

## Victorian Evening

This season's Christmas social evening, which had a Victorian Theme proved to be a great success with the largest attendance ever. It was lovely to see how many members had taken the trouble to dress appropriately with great style and often humour, which all added to the spirit of the occasion. As usual the supper was splendid, and our special thanks go to Iris Gregory for organising this and to all those who contributed. (Please note that money for food can be reclaimed by those who helped provide the food).

Something new this year was the little Victorian concert, which was very well received, and we are grateful to all those brave members and their families who took part.

The Editor has received the following letter from Alan Roach:

Dear Editor,

Could I take just a little space in the next newsletter to say 'thank You' on behalf of everyone who attended the Society's Victorian evening on 11th December. The atmosphere was splendid just right for a party of all age groups - a quiz with everyone competing to win, homely entertainment from pre-TV times and ample refreshments.

I have experienced the worries of organising similar functions and think that Tim Herrington, Iris Gregory, the Oliver family and all others who appeared in supporting roles deserve warm thanks from the rest of the Society members for producing a first rate evening of entertainment.

## Mummers Play

Members who were at the Victorian Evening may be interested in learning a little more about the Mummers Play which concluded the concert. Up until the early part of this century it was the custom in many villages for a group of men to produce a Mummers Play at Christmas. The group would go around to the big houses in the area and hope to be rewarded with money and to be treated to some of the Christmas hospitality.

The script that was used at our party originated from the Hampshire Village of Yateley. The plays all seem to be based on the Crusades with King George fighting the Turkish Knight who gets killed and then restored to life by the Doctor. Presumably the details of the play were handed down by word of mouth and therefore the words, names and meaning tended to get confused. Our actors found the lines difficult to remember because they were such a mixture of verse, which frequently failed to scan or rhyme and straight dialogue.

One of the characters was called 'Turkey Snipe' and that assumed to be a corruption of 'Turkish Knight'. In the traditional Old Basing play there are characters called 'Ball Roamer' (Bold Roamer) and 'British Star' (British Tar).

Thomas Hardy in his novel 'The Return of the Native' gives a fascinating account of the preparations and production of a Mummers Play of 'Saint George', starting with its rehearsal in a barn. Sisters and Sweethearts were employed making the costumes although this was not without drawbacks because 'the girls could never be brought to respect tradition in designing and decorating the armour; they insisted on attaching loops and bows of silk and velvet in any situation pleasing to their taste. Furthermore they tried to outdo one another by adding more silks and ribbons than

their friends, the result was that the characters could not be distinguished except the Doctor who was somberly dressed and Father Christmas who was usually an older man, equipped with a club and who looked after the purse.

It seems that locally the actors were not so well off or did not have such competitive womenfolk because the Old Basing Mummers (known as 'The Jolly Boys') are recorded as having large paper hats and being dressed with coloured paper and streamers cut from wallpaper.

I wonder if it was the demise of the country house or the attraction of being able to go carol singing with no preparation that caused the Mummers to cease their traditional Christmas production.

Contributed.

#### Daneshill Urmfield

Some of you will probably have seen the notice in the press about the discovery of some burial urns during the preliminary scrape for a new road running behind Daneshill House. These urns, and some unaccompanied cremations have been rescued by the staff of the museum who say they date from the later Bronze Age. It is unlikely that the full extent of the urn field has been uncovered and it is hoped that more work can be done later in the year. The chance of discovering the settlement which went with the burial ground is also an exciting possibility making the Little Basing area one of the most fruitful archaeologically in the county, with the Cowdery's Down site just across the valley.

The subsoil at Daneshill where the urnfield is situated is most unusual for this area, being a gravel of small waterworn pebbles. If the site is excavated later this year, and our society is called upon to help, it could provide some challenging and useful experience for those of us more used to the easier stratification of chalk sites.

M. Oliver

#### Economies bring Restrictions to the County Museum Service

The following correspondence passed between this society and the Director of the County Museum Service, Ken Barton, after restrictions at the Willis Museum, Basingstoke brought an end to our 'pot washing' evenings.

Mr K Barton  
Director Hampshire County Museum Service,  
Chilcomb House, Chilcomb Road, Winchester.

27th November 1980

Dear Ken,

Tim Schadla-Hall has passed on the disturbing news that work in the Willis Museum Annexe, including this Society's activities, must, as an economy measure, cease until further notice. In addition we understand, for the same reasons of economy, Museum staff have been stopped from directing and supervising the current field-walking programme at weekends. Both of these decisions come as very heavy blows to us.

You are no doubt aware of the important contribution this Society makes to local archaeology in the Basingstoke area. Apart from the Museum Service itself we are the only active archaeological body engaged on fieldwork in and around Basingstoke, but without the facilities of the Museum our contribution would be negligible. For several years you have kindly permitted us to use one room in the Willis Museum Annexe, for a few hours at weekends and a weekday evening, for washing, sorting and labelling our finds, finds which have in turn become part of the Museum's collections. When we have not had our own material to work on we have directed our attention to the unprocessed material belonging to the Museum. We are sure you would agree these activities have been of mutual benefit. In particular they have helped us to extend the archaeological knowledge of the neighbourhood by research, discovery and museum acquisition and enabled us to train our members, especially the younger ones, providing them with knowledge and insight. Without the Museum and its facilities this valuable amenity is lost.

If this were not enough we are to lose our fieldwalking programme also! Changes in the way archaeology is organised over recent years have resulted in a greater dependence on local amateur groups for fieldwork activities such as field-walking. But amateurs need to be trained to walk fields intelligently and effectively

and training can be given only by experts. To stop weekend working, removing the museum staff experts from the field, effectively brings the current fieldwalking programme in North East Hampshire to a decisive end for this winter. Your economic measures have hit this Society and the Basingstoke area doubly hard. We are barred from working on the material currently to hand and we are also stopped from carrying out our only major fieldwork activity. When a Society usually active in practical fieldwork is forced into passive 'armchair' archaeology, as we are now, it is both a loss and a shame. We would wish you to know this.

R. H. Searle Esq., Chairman,  
Basingstoke Archaeological Society  
8 Band Hall Place, Hook, Basingstoke.

3rd December, 1980

I thank you for your letter of 27th November which is not unexpected. You will appreciate that the same situation befalls you as not only befalls the staff of this institution but also all volunteers and all Friends organisations associated with it. I have been instructed to reduce my expenditure to make up a deficit of £26,000 in this current year. I cannot reduce that expenditure without cutting off all possible activities other than those which allow the public to enter the museums and galleries. That is my prime intention. Therefore I have withdrawn all staff from peripheral buildings and brought them into the main building. Further and stricter measures are still yet to be imposed and I am fighting these off. These will affect the very opening hours of the museum itself. Such are the times we are in.

I do not at any time wish to cause particular and specific harm to the Basingstoke Archaeological Society anymore than I wish to do it to any other Society, and being an archaeologist and a one time amateur archaeologist I fully appreciate the nature of the problem. I am however certain that there are plenty of activities that the Society could fulfill on its own behalf without the activities of the museum staff. Fieldwalking is not a wholly museum orientated exercise and this should not cause the museum any cost whatsoever if you choose to walk the fields yourself. This may seem a little harsh but I cannot afford to pay travelling time or any other expenditure of that kind at this particular time.

Had I known this situation would have arisen I would never have launched a fieldwalking programme in the first place, but I am sure that you and your Society will understand the delicate nature of the situation and if you wish us to be able to continue in some reasonable vein in the next financial year then these restrictions over this winter you will see bear good fruit in that particular direction. Once again with sincere apologies for any inconvenience that these cuts may have caused,

It was not expected that our letter should change the course of action but we could not sit by and allow ourselves to be turned out of the Willis Museum without voicing our objection and displeasure.

#### North East Hampshire Field Walking Programme

Before receiving Ken Barton's reply to our letter we had decided to continue with the fieldwalking programme. Martin Millett offered to lead us on a voluntary basis, without expenses, which is a clear indication of how important he feels this kind of work to be.

The following Sundays have been set aside for fieldwalking:-

January 18

February 1 and 15

March 1 and 15

Until further notice we shall be walking at Lodge Farm, North Warnborough. We shall meet at the roundabout at the northern end (nearest M3) of the Odiham by-pass currently under construction at 10.00 a.m.. With a break for lunch at 1.00 p.m., we shall continue each day until about 4.00 p.m. Warm, waterproof clothing is essential.

As meeting places change Peter Heath (Basingstoke 27713) and Richard Searle (Hook 2411) will be notified on the Friday prior to each walking Sunday. We cannot give longer notice because farmers are unable to guarantee a ploughed field until the last minute. Anyone unable to contact Peter or Richard beforehand can meet Martin at 9.45 a.m. on the day, outside the George, High Street, Odiham, for further instructions.

Whenever we decide to walk, the meeting place will be on a road or good track and we will attempt to leave at least one car at this point all day with a note on it telling later arrivals where we are walking. No excuses then for not knowing where we are!

Because the Museum Service has withdrawn its support for the project we are having to liase with farmers ourselves. If anyone has contacts with farmers between Basingstoke and Farnborough I should like to know as this is the best way of finding suitable fields to walk. We are particularly anxious to make contacts in the north-east corner of our survey area, towards Fleet.

Richard Searle

#### Notes

Following a committee decision to charge non-members 25p for attendnace at a lecture, our membership Secretary, Iris Gregory, now sits at the door of the Clennell Room, for our monthly lecture with a list of members. We would be grateful if members could tick off their names against the list; non-members are asked to sign up so that we can send them further information about the Society.

Will all members who have not yet paid their 1980/81 subscription's please note that this is positively their last reminder: no further copies of the newsletter will be sent. (Anyone wishing to check whether or not they have paid can easily do so with Iris at the next lecture).

Also a reminder to all former Willis members that you are members of the new joint society, and are more than welcome to attend all functions of the Society.