

BASINGSTOKE ARCHAEOLOGICAL & HISTORICAL SOCIETY



N E W S L E T T E R

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CALENDAR

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- Thurs 16 May "Music for a May Evening" Friends of the Willis Museum, 7.30 pm, Willis Museum
- Sat 18 May HFC Local History Section visit to Farnham
- Sat 25 May HFC guided tour of Wolvesey Castle, Winchester (meet at main gates to Wolvesey Palace, College Street, 11.30)
- * Sat 8 June AFTERNOON EXCURSION: SITES NEAR BASINGSTOKE see page 2
- * Thurs 11 July ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING followed by slide-tape presentation on Hampshire countryside

NB Training excavation late July/August

- Sat 7 Sept HFC Centenary Conference, Winchester College, "Hampshire and the Kingdom" (fee £2 for members of HFC, £4 for non-members)
- * Sat 21 Sept DAY EXCURSION: MARY ROSE etc - see page 2

* Society activity

Secretary: Mrs Sue Headley, 31 Winchester Street, Overton

Items for Newsletter to Mrs Barbara Applin, 138 Old Kempshott Lane, Basingstoke

SUBSCRIPTIONS

A reminder that subscriptions for 1985-6 are due on 1st May:

£6 for individual members
 £8 for family membership
 £3 for OAPs and students

Our Treasurer will be glad to receive subscriptions at meetings or by post:

Mrs Sarah Duckworth, 177 Pack Lane, Kempshott, Basingstoke

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING AND AFTER

The Annual General Meeting will be on Thursday, 11th July at Chute House. To follow the business proceedings we have booked the Countryside Commission's slide-tape presentation on Hampshire's countryside heritage.

EXCURSIONS

Our full-day excursion will be centred round a visit to the Mary Rose at Portsmouth, but as they are unable to take our party in June we have postponed it till Saturday 21th September. We hope to include a visit to an excavation. More details and cost (probably about £5) later. Meanwhile please note the date.

We are keeping the date Saturday 8th June for a half-day outing to sites near Basingstoke, using our own cars. If you can offer or need a lift, please ring Basingstoke 465439 or 24263. The details are not yet fixed, so it is something of a "mystery tour". Meet at the car park by the Westfield Lido (West Ham Roundabout) at 2 pm. And if you have local maps, bring them with you!

POT WASHING

At the moment pot washing is continuing on Tuesday evenings at 3 Milkingpen Lane, Old Basing. If you are interested, ring Basingstoke 24263 to check how long sessions continue.

ELLISFIELD

It has been suggested that we should follow up Mr Mayo's article in the last Newsletter by doing a fieldwalk of the site. We hope to arrange this for the autumn.

THE WOLFSON GALLERIES AT THE BRITISH MUSEUM

The Wolfson Galleries are a series of rooms in the basement of the British Museum that have been opened up to display much of the material which was acquired by the Museum in the last century and has been kept in store, most of it since 1939. The exhibits are all from the Graeco-Roman Classical period and were originally the private collections of 18th and 19th century antiquarians who collected miscellaneous pieces of sculpture, both by purchasing them in the open market and by acquiring them direct from the sites of ruinous cities or temples.

The turn of the 19th century was a time of a second reawakening of understanding of the classical world, the first being at the Renaissance. The disciplines of archaeology and history of art and architecture were still fused together and a collector's interest was very broad and general; therefore the precise location of each find was of less importance than its subject matter. Moreover, in those days restoration involved far more re-creation than it does today.

It was also a time when visible traces of the Classical world were disappearing fast, a fact one must not forget when modern criticism backed by nationalist interests complains about pillaging cities for their goodies. Indeed, if it were not for men like Charles Townley, whose collection forms the background of the display, Lord Elgin and Heinrich Schliemann, our re-awakening may have been delayed until it was too late.

The majority of the galleries have been open to the public for some time now, but only for those sculptures that were of Roman or Hellenic date, ie roughly AD onwards. Much of our knowledge of the Greek world comes from this date because the Romans, possibly being a more practical and less sensitive race, adopted much of the Greeks' art and mythology wholesale as a sheet anchor for their own busy well-ordered and sometimes cruel way of life. Hence many Roman copies of early Greek sculptures have survived. It is these that are displayed in Rooms 82 to 85 and have been open for over a year. And a great display it is, of Roman sarcophagi, satyrs, copies of Venus and all the raw material that inspired the Renaissance. The famous Discus Thrower comes from this period.

However, the earlier period of Greek sculpture is displayed in Rooms 79-81 and for me is the more interesting, for it is the formation time of the Classical period, and it was these rooms which were being opened for the first time when the Prince and Princess of Wales conducted the formal ceremony of opening the whole gallery on April 3rd. It is amusing to note that Buckingham Palace was a little concerned about the Princess being so closely associated with so much "free" sculpture and an instruction was given for her to be shown past the relevant exhibits as quickly as possible, but a press photographer caught her with an unwitting gaze at something not quite lady-like.

I made a point of visiting the Galleries on the following day, only to find they were still closed for a private function, namely a reception for archaeologists and curators etc. My heart sank, but a chance remark put me in touch with Tony King of the Hampshire Field Club who had a spare ticket, so in I went.

The first room, no 78, is mostly inscriptions (in Greek) and epitaphs at that. The exhibits are of pre-400 BC, when there was no standard Greek script and Athens was still absorbing the ways of the Attic tradition. For example, the Athenian sigma at the time was Σ , gamma was Γ and lamda Λ . Epitaphs were a popular sort of monument, but being so expensive there was a great temptation to skimp on the cost of the erection of a tomb and to re-use an old one, a practice much discouraged and abhorred, judging by the number of notices found prohibiting it.

The following two rooms, 79 and 80, are of Early Greek Sculpture represented in the main by stelai, or sculptured tomb stones. These are fascinating, for they are all of an early date, for in about 317/6 BC there was a law forbidding all but the simplest monument, thus effectively putting to an end a form of art which had become well developed and unique for its time.

These stelai may not be so well preserved or outstanding as those found in the Louvre or in Athens, but nevertheless they show a certain rational and humanist approach to death in a pre-Christian era which has much appeal in our own time. The deceased are often pictured as when in good health and taking leave of their near and dear ones. There are no weapons, banners, tears or angels so beloved of succeeding centuries, but touching domestic scenes with children and pets and so forth. It is a style of sculpture which is at the dawn of Western art and which we in the Western world sub-consciously accept as the norm in representing the human form. It is interesting to see how only a few years earlier than this, within decades, the representation of the human figure had been in the form of a stiff and erect kouros, which is a direct descendant of the type of carving that is limited by the shape of a rectangular block of stone or ivory or tree trunk. Within two or three generations a style of art developed which is still accepted today.

There is another aspect of the sculptures in the fourth room, Number 81, which one is able to comprehend in the light of later developments, and that is symbolism. Symbolism has always been an ingredient of art, but on these stelai of the "Later Greek Sculpture" period there appear in the carvings representations of unrelated objects such as a snake or wreath or a horse's head. The former two, we are told, indicate the status of being a hero, and the wreath that the quality of being famous and a hero was recognised in the deceased's lifetime. This is not too far removed from identifying any Saint Luke by a bull, or carving a bust of George IV with a wreath on his head.

In all, the collection of exhibits in the Wolfson Galleries is essentially a collection of objects of art rather than archaeology. But then, the BM always has been a depository of artifacts with a very high aesthetic value, for after all, what is a Museum but a place where the Muses live?

RICHARD DEXTER

FUTURE PLANS FOR MAIDEN CASTLE

At the recent CBA Group 12 meeting at Salisbury Museum, Dr Geoffrey Wainwright, Principal Inspector of Ancient Monuments, English Heritage, was one of the speakers. He outlined the plans for the re-presentation and re-excavation of Maiden Castle, one of the most popular archaeological sites in the country. The programme, which will involve a number of different bodies, will start this year, and be in full swing in 1986 when Britain plays host to the World Archaeological Conference at Southampton. It will include a land survey, scale 1/1000, including geophysical and photographic surveys of the monument and its surrounding area, so that it can be seen in its related landscape - a similar scheme to the Stonehenge Environs Project. There will also be reinstatement of the ramparts, parts of which have been badly eroded by the public. A pilot scheme will commence in April, with the major work being done in 1986.

The re-excavation will be directed to specific problems of interpretation which cannot be solved from the Wheeler archive. They are:

- 1 the changing environment from Neolithic to Roman times
- 2 the Iron Age cultural sequence
- 3 the East gate.

The first of three separate digs will take place from mid July to the end of August this year, and will, under the direction of Dr J. Evans, study the Neolithic enclosure and bank barrow to get radio-carbon dating material and environmental data. Next year, the Wessex Archaeological Trust will re-excavate a 15 x 30 m trench in the quarry hollow, to look again at Iron Age stratified deposits, and will also open up an area of the East gate, cleaning further into the camp to try to find the gate posts. Archaeology has come a long way since Sir Mortimer Wheeler was working at Maiden Castle, and it is certain that his findings will be supplemented and refined. But it is doubtful whether he will be eclipsed as a populariser of archaeology, particularly well-known for the imaginative presentation of his work at Maiden Castle in a way which people could understand and enjoy.

The question of presentation to the public provoked most discussion at the CBA meeting. It is planned to improve facilities for visitors - minimal at present - by posters on site, and leaflets of information available in the car park, and eventually by provision of a permanent interpretation centre. The location of this centre is the cause of the discussion: should it be on the hill, where, it is argued, a building could spoil the wildness and grandeur of the site? should it be right away, for example in Dorchester, where perhaps it could rival the County Museum which already has displays on the hillfort? or should it be in the car park - although at the moment there are several approaches to the site, all by minor road. It seems that the strength of feeling roused in the Dorchester area by the plans for its most famous monument could rival the controversy caused by the Stonehenge and Salisbury Plain proposals!

THE LAST CRUSADER

Reading Joyce Carey's book, MEMOIR OF THE BOBOTES, reminded me of a bundle of old postcards which told a strange story of the Balkans. Old Edwardian postcards have always fascinated me, with their glimpses of comfortable and leisurely holidays and Sunday muffin teas. These postcards were different: they could have been written by any soldier to his wife during any war. But the writer, Fred, was not a soldier and need not have been at that particular war at all.

The Balkan War of 1912-13 was one of those confusing conflicts which made South-Eastern Europe a battleground in the early years of this century. On November 12th, 1912, Turkey requested an armistice, the War having ended in a complete victory for the Balkan League of Serbia, Bulgaria and Greece, and the Treaty of London was signed on May 1st, 1913.

Between these dates Fred decided to join in, and left wife and family in Deal to become a medical orderly with the Bulgarian Forces, stationed at a hospital for Turkish prisoners near Sofia. Then followed this series of postcards, giving a tantalising hint of life behind the Balkan battlefield, uncomfortable, primitive, yet convivial, seventy years ago.

Fred was not a professional soldier. One can only wonder what impulse led him to take a boat from Dover on the long journey to Sofia on a cold November morning in 1912. Was any humanitarian plea being made in the English press? Was a private relief organisation being formed? This is not clear. Did he know that an armistice had been requested the very day he left England? His first postcard does not answer any of these questions. From Frankfurt, postmarked 13.11.12, understamped, it merely stated

"In Frankfurt today,
Love, Fred."

There is then a time interval until December 4th. Between that date and Christmas Day he wrote a number of postcards from the area of Sofia. The content of these cards shows that Fred was a press correspondent any newspaper of the day would have been proud to employ.

A "Snow now is deep here, and the wolves are prowling round the villages. The pariah dogs are mad with hunger. One bit a Bulgar today. When I come late from the hospital to the hotel at night I carry a dagger and a club as the brutes attack you."

B "Here you will see me in a Turkish fez, with a Bulgar sentry near me. Also a party of Russian and Bulgar students outside our hospital. Three Turkish soldiers (Prisoners) in front of group: Bulgar doctor, Greek nurse, Russian lady doctor. Don't you think I look like a Turk, in my uniform?"

(And there is Fred in person. A little pompous? Perhaps, but the postcards become suddenly real.)

C "Here is one of the boiling hot lakes in the mountains where we are stationed; so altogether we are not too badly off."

D "Who said that they thought there were no girls out here? I might be getting off yet, but I don't like the fashions."

(A group of Bulgarian ladies in peasant dress; and to prove he was joking):

"Fondest love from your dear hubby, Fred."

E To a friend. "You will be surprised to hear I am out here at the war. Always open for excitement, and getting it here amongst the wounded and dying Turks."

F "Just a line to wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. I can see we are going to have a great time here Christmas (Eh What!)"

G "This is a photo of the Bulgar mobilisation of troops. A gay lot, don't you think. We are still busy, and hope the war will soon come to a close."

H "Here you will see our small party with the Bulgarian officers at dinner. I expect you will think we are a funny lot. See me, just in it on the right marked "X". We have had the Daily Mirror and Bystander War Correspondents and photographer here. He has taken our party and myself six times ... So you had better take it for the next four weeks and when you see my photos in it get three copies of each."

Between December 25th and March 4th there is no record. Then a few postcards from Belgrade hint at a traditional "returned from the wars" reception. His passage home through Buda-pest, Vienna and Munich was marked by postcards of a brevity which somehow managed to hint of the wine, beer, and conviviality which eased the tedious journey home.

J "(Munich) This is the place to stay. Plenty of good beer, and it is the festivity season. Here for two hours. Note ABC in the top corner of the card. This is A for Art, B for Beer, and C for Churches. Arrive in England Friday sound in wind and limb. All rush."

Dover on March 6th saw the return of the last Crusader, and the war which inspired Shaw's ARMS AND THE MAN and THE CHOCOLATE SOLDIER was over for Fred. No doubt with many memories of wolves, slivovitz and Russian lady doctors to enliven his English fireside.

Until a month later, some of the stories of travel hardship were somewhat contradicted by a postcard from Vienna which required a little explanation:

K "Kind regards from Vienna where I am again. Do you remember our stop in Munich with the good, dark beer. Truly yours, Ludovico Schmidt."

And so the story ends, sixteen months before a much greater war began in the Balkans and engulfed the world, and swallowed up Fred and the Bulgars, the Turks and the Russians, and friend Ludovico from Vienna. But seventy years after, it is possible to read a little social history and much human interest from these old cards, which a lone Englishman sat down to write in a small Bulgarian town, with the wolves howling in the snow outside. In this atomic age, how long ago it seems, that Balkan fairy-land of 1912.

(You may perhaps ask why the editor decided to accept this short article for a newsletter devoted to archaeology and matters of local history! One of the souvenirs Fred brought back with him was a photograph of a pile of skulls heaped up on a bare field with the caption "The Fruits of War". It reminded me of the photograph of the heap of bones uncovered by Sir Mortimer Wheeler at Maiden Castle, and I suddenly realised that the ward of today could well be the archaeology of the future. On the other hand, she might just have thought it was an interesting tale!

ANDREW DUCKWORTH

HAMMER BEAMS etc

In March Dr Julian Mumby of Oxford University lectured to the Historic Buildings Section of the Hampshire Field Club on "The Medieval Carpenter". This lecture should have been entitled "Medieval Church Roofs" as most of it was about and illustrated by the techniques of roof building. Carpenters and the tools of their trade were not mentioned.

However, Dr Mumby was an enthusiast who knew his subject thoroughly and he spent almost 1½ hours tracing the development of roofing large buildings as instanced by churches from the Norman period to the introduction of the hammer beam technique - a quantum leap of its time as it allowed a greatly increased area to be supported without pillars.

Almost as an aside an important conservation project in Oxford High Street was mentioned, as an illustration of the prefabrication of timber frame buildings. According to Dr Mumby, the wood would have been worked and assembled unseasoned and the drying process used to lock the assembly together.

BOB APPLIN

POPULAR ARCHAEOLOGY

One of our members has kindly donated a set of back numbers of Popular Archaeology to the Society. They will be brought to lectures so that members can borrow them.