
SOCIETY NEWS

THE BULLETIN OF THE ENFIELD ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY



JUNE 1981

No. 81

ABSENT FRIENDS

We have received a letter from Cyril and Elsie Smith in which they ask to be remembered to their friends in the Society. They also sent a donation to our funds which is much appreciated.

Elsie and Cyril were loyal members of the Society and seldom missed a meeting. They moved some years ago from Southgate to Navenby in Lincolnshire which, as Cyril says in his letter, is on the Jurassic Ridge, a fact soon established by gardeners there! He also comments on our search for Ermine Street by remarking that the northern extension of this road can be seen as a massive agger close to where he lives.

Nevertheless the search for our part of the Roman road goes on and over the Easter weekend a section was cut across the playing fields of Edmonton County School.

A crop mark was noted there some time ago and, being near the accepted alignment, a trench was necessary to determine what it is. Unfortunately, as John Ivens explains later in this bulletin, it turned out to be a service road to the former clay pits in Cornishes Brickfields.

VISIT - HOUSE OF COMMONS

MONDAY 2 NOVEMBER 1981 10 am

With the assistance of Ted Graham MP and John Neal the above visit has been arranged which will include a tour of the Parliament buildings, lasting about 1½ hours, to be followed, subject to weather conditions, with a visit to one of the archaeological sites under excavation in the City of London.

The party is restricted to 32 members and those wishing to come on a first come first served basis can do so by contacting John Ivens 120 Hedge Lane N13 by letter only please.

A packed lunch is recommended, and the taking of photographs inside Westminster is not allowed.

A small fee may be made to those attending and this will be collected when the party meets at 10 am outside the Chancellor's Gate which is at the House of Lords entrance.

Nearer the day a circular will be issued with additional necessary information.

John Ivens

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

All meetings will be held in Millfield House Arts Centre Silver Street
Edmonton at 8 pm. For further details 'phone 886 1375.

17th June Wednesday

LOOKING AT OLD HOUSES
Adrian Gibson

We have not received the expected synopsis so it is not possible to give much in the way of detail to describe this lecture. However, the title is self explanatory and it should prove informative and useful. How often do we look at a house and wish that we knew more about the constructional characteristics of buildings and to be able to date them a little more closely than Victorian, Georgian and that rather vague description, "timber framed, possibly Tudor"? One of the Council for British Archaeology's earlier publications was 'The Investigation of Smaller Domestic Buildings' and is well worth reading. There are, of course, many useful books on the subject in the local libraries (but reading these books is not quite the same thing as having it explained to us and being able to ask questions!).

15th July Wednesday

FILMED EXCAVATION -
ROMAN POTTERY KILN HIGHGATE WOODS
Harvey Sheldon

The excavations carried out between 1966 and 1974 on the northern ridge of Highgate Wood have shown that pottery was made on the site from c AD 50-160. Four phases of production have been recognised and three distinct fabric types identified. There is no evidence of any settlement in the area and it is assumed that the kilns were only occasionally worked over a period of a hundred years by itinerant potters who sold their products at the nearby settlements; London would have offered a ready market for pottery. Why the Highgate kilns ceased production is not known but it may be linked to the apparent fall in population at some sites and the abandonment of others during the second century (see notes on the GPO site in this issue). In 1971 an experiment aimed at producing pottery similar to that made on the site in Roman times was carried out at Highgate Wood. Kilns were built using an excavated example as a model. Pots were made from local clay and loaded into the kilns which were then fired. Details of the excavations, the lifting of one of the kilns for display in the Horniman Museum and the experiments in kiln building and pot-firing were published in the London Archaeologist. The kiln is now on display at Bruce Castle Museum Tottenham. This meeting marks a welcome return of Harvey Sheldon who will be showing the film.

LECTURE REPORTS

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF MESOPOTAMIA Ian Jones chose a large canvas for his subject on Wednesday 14th January when he spoke about the 'Archaeology of Mesopotamia'. Having previously given a detailed history in the December bulletin, Ian went on to describe some of the more important sites. He illustrated many of the discoveries made in the area since exploration began in the 19th century; from the work of Layard, who removed many large statues now in the British Museum, to the more scientific excavations by Woolley during the 1920's and 1930's. The items shown included pottery in everyday use, bronzework and some beautiful statues, as well as several of the objects found in the Royal tombs at Ur. Here the rulers were buried not only with a large selection of their worldly goods but also with their servants, who had died for the express purpose of accompanying their ruler into the next world.

That bureaucracy is not a recent innovation is shown by the fact that a vast army of clerks and administrators was required to look after a relatively small population. One site has produced over 20,000 clay tablets on which are recorded details of the local records and which still await examination and publication.

There were drawn reconstructions of the temples and houses of the periods concerned, as well as photographs of those sites which have been rebuilt by the Iraq government.

The harshness of the age was exemplified by the code of laws which called for an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. A legal system which, as the speaker reminded us, could become rather messy at times. There were pictures of the many tells which dot the Mesopotamian plain. These are made up of the remains of mud brick houses, one on top of the other. Because of the enormous cost and the labour involved few have been adequately explored. How splendid it would be if a joint effort could be made to fully excavate at least one tell. The contribution to our knowledge and understanding of the past would be tremendous. Alan Cole very kindly brought along some cylinder seals and other objects which were put on display.

G.R.G.

ROMAN LONDON - GPO SITE NEWGATE STREET The meeting on Wednesday 11th February was more than just another excavation report, interesting as that report was in itself. Steve Roskhams began by putting Roman London into its historical perspective; its location, its origins and its relative importance. He showed how the site was deliberately chosen by the planners and that it was originally independent of the road system as a whole.

The town had its origin in a military base constructed at the time of the Claudian invasion in AD 43 on one of the two low hills, both of which Roman London was later to occupy. Occupation of the GPO site began in the 50's and came to an abrupt end when it was destroyed by fire during the Boudiccan revolt of AD 60. The road which ran from the centre of the former military base and known to have been constructed during the first century has a slight 'kink' just before it reaches the GPO site and suggests this is where the road left the boundary of the then occupied area. During subsequent reconstruction work the road to the south, now followed by Newgate Street, was laid out and was occupied by strip houses and other buildings with narrow frontages but extending back from the road for a considerable distance. A side road was constructed alongside one of these buildings and a narrow alleyway ran between two others. Nearby kilns point to industrial activity, although the nature of this activity is not yet known. There was a disastrous fire in AD 125 which destroyed a large part of Roman London and buildings on the GPO site did not escape. The fact that rebuilding followed the original lines so closely suggests there were some sort of town plans, perhaps tax records, available. In about AD 180 occupation ceased when the site was covered with a thick layer of soil and it became an agricultural area within the city. Why this was done is uncertain. It happened elsewhere and one of the aims of current research is to seek an explanation.

G.R.G.

RE-USED MATERIAL How often this term is used in archaeological reports to describe material of one age which has been re-used, often for an entirely different purpose at a later period. The use of tombstones and funerary monuments from Roman London in the construction of bastions on the city walls during the troubled times of the third and fourth centuries is a well known example. The timbers in old houses, which from the evidence of joints, peg holes, etc show how they had served at least one previous purpose before being incorporated into the building.

I recently noticed a less exotic re-use of material. In Cecil Road Enfield, next to the Baptist Church, is a flower bed edged with concrete blocks. These blocks each have a slot and were originally set side by side, slot uppermost, to provide parking facilities for bicycles. The proliferation of the motor car, or at least the moped, led to the decline in use of the bicycle and therefore the use of these blocks. So, they were put to good use elsewhere to provide a neat edge to an herbaceous border and where they now form part of the local archaeological record.

G.R.G.

WHY THE EXPERTS ARE MAKING IT HARD FOR YOU TO FIND DIGS

Some of the most dramatic archaeological sites in Britain are being kept secret by professional archaeologists who fear publicity would lead to looting by professional treasure hunters.

One such site is a Roman fortress town with walls 20ft thick. Another is a Roman palace which is believed to contain the longest single mosaic terrace ever found.

Archaeologists are sleeping at their sites to protect them. At Colchester, a Roman cemetery had to be protected by barbed wire and flood lights after the graves were looted.

Archaeologists are also disguising the information they publish by omitting topographical and map references of their sites in their formal reports. This follows a recommendation to do so by their professional organisation, the Council for British Archaeology (CBA). Indeed some of the more alarmed members of the profession write privately to each other of their finds, but do not publish details.

"There is just no point in trying to get statutory protection for a site by getting the Department of the Environment to declare it a scheduled monument", said Mr Bryn Walters, who discovered the famous Orpheus mosaic at Littlecote, Buckinghamshire, and who has kept the site guarded ever since. "The DoE scheduled list just acts as a signpost for the treasure hunters. I have had Roman villas where frescoes have been pickaxed and tossed away so that the vandals can get to a coin underneath. But often it is not a coin at all. A piece of fused clay can give them a reading on the metal detector and that's it."

Constant lobbying by the CBA led to the passing of an act, on the last day of the previous Labour government, which provided for a £200 fine on the use of metal detectors on scheduled archaeological sites. But the act has still not been put into force by the DoE, and will not be applied "until early next year", the department said yesterday. Meanwhile the DoE has been asked to investigate the wares offered in antiquarian catalogues which come from areas close to protected sites. J Moor Antiquities of York has a current catalogue offering finds from Owby, Ancaster, Icklingham and Ixworth - all areas which include large protected monuments.

A spokesman for J Moor said yesterday: "We only buy items from two professional treasure hunters, who are known to us as reputable people. We would not, in any circumstances, offer items from protected sites."

Mr Henry Cleare, Director of the CBA, said yesterday: "We know that there is a growing trade in British antiquities, and that this country's heritage is literally being stolen from beneath our feet. We know that items have been smuggled out to New York, some of them on US Air Force aircraft. We had to get the American Judge-Advocate General to issue a special order forbidding it."

He added: "We know these items are for sale in New York salesrooms, but we also know that so far not one antiquity has been referred to the Department of Trade's reviewing committee for the export permit that they legally must have."

The CBA banded together last year with other interested groups, including the Rescue Archaeological Trust and the Museums Association to form the STOP campaign, which stands for Stop Taking Our Past. STOP's aim is to educate public opinion into making treasure hunting socially unacceptable.

But this led to the formation of DIG, a pressure and information group on behalf of the metal detector industry and users. With 250,000 metal detectors in Britain, specialists clubs and magazines, DIG represents a potent lobby which has just won its first major political victory.

The County of Kent Bill, a compendium of local authority legislation, went to the House of Lords last month containing one clause which banned the use of metal detectors from all council property. The clause was killed after representations to the Lords committee by DIG and leading detector manufacturers. Even so the bill leaves open the prospect of passing bye-laws to prohibit the use of such detectors. Such bye-laws carry a maximum penalty of £50, a minute figure compared to the potential price of some antiquities.

DIG insists that it is a responsible body, which supports efforts to stamp out treasure hunting on genuine archaeological sites. It says: "Less than one per cent of metal detector users act illegally". The CBA points out that one per cent of 250,000 detectors means 2,500 detectors.

DIG also claims that few detectors scan more than eight inches below the earth's surface, a depth which should not interfere with the workings of professional archaeologists.

But archaeologists point to the devastated Roman site at Mildenhall, raided at night by treasure hunters who dug through a floor to a depth of 2ft 4ins. Archaeological sites tell the experts little unless the successive historical layers are undisturbed, and each find can be precisely related to its own layer.

A tiny portion of a vast archaeological site can provide fragile but vital historical clues. A classic example is the Orpheus temple just restored at Littlecote. It took detailed scientific analysis to see that the crumbling mosaic of Orpheus had once been accompanied by a tiny dog. This enabled the archaeologists to decipher the symbolism and realise that they were looking at a unique pagan temple - and not just a rich man's decorated dining room.

We are grateful to Sylvia Collicott for obtaining permission from the Editor of The Guardian to reprint this article by Martin Walker.

It would be pleasant to be able to say that improvements had been made since this article was originally published in August 1980, but we cannot. The situation is still far from satisfactory.

POSTSCRIPT TO 'A PAIR OF OLD BOOTS'

After reading the report in the March bulletin regarding the discovery of a pair of boots beneath the floor of a house in Chase Green Avenue Enfield, Miss A Butler kindly sent the following notes:

"Further to the March 1981 edition of "Society News" I would recommend anyone interested in the pair of ladies boots found in late 19th century Enfield house to read the following booklet:

"Shoes Concealed in Buildings" by J M Swann
(reprinted from Journal No 6 of the
Northampton Museum and Art Gallery)

Shoes and other footwear have apparently been found built into the fabric of houses in the southern half of England and Wales, with isolated examples in North America.

There are too many examples for the shoes to have been lost accidentally. Many can be shown to date from either the period of the building of the house or from some major alteration, such as the insertion of a chimney and floor, or re-roofing. There are a number of examples, too, of pictures of shoes or footprints scratched onto lead roofs, which may be part of the same idea.

The shoes are almost always in poor condition and from objects sometimes buried with them, there is some evidence to suggest a sacrificial offering but no 'concrete' evidence on the reasons for the concealment have come to light.

Some examples have been deliberately cut before burial.

The witness of a concealment which took place as late as 1935 could elicit no reason from the father who seemed ashamed of what he was doing.

Some collections of shoes appear to have been added to over the years as they are all of differing dates.

To the back of the booklet I have mentioned is an appendix giving details of other shoes found - dating back as far as the 15th century.

Since the boots were filled with wood shavings it seems to me reasonable to suppose that they were deliberately put there when the house was being built as some sort of propitiatory offering, or remnant of superstition."

This letter reminded me of the remains of a cat found some years ago by Roger Dormer beneath the floor of his house and I discussed with him my thoughts on the possibility of this having been a sacrificial offering! Although we arrived at no firm conclusion regarding the fate of the cat he did rather startle me by saying that a few years before the discovery of the cat his father found a pair of old shoes beneath floorboards when he was replacing a joist in the house!
The house No 24 Chase Side Enfield is one of a terrace of houses built in 1823.

A patten, a sort of early 19th century overshoe, and a leather sole from another item of footwear were found some years ago during renovation work at the Fallow Buck Clay Hill Enfield. They had been recovered from the filling of a 17th century fireplace into which a 19th century castiron fireplace and some shelves had been inserted.

Ian Jones Bulletin No 57 June 1975

Examples of concealed shoes as well as many other objects: pots, charms, witch bottles, etc, deposited in or beneath buildings, are given in 'Folk-lore in London Archaeology' by Ralph Merrifield, published in the London Archaeologist 1969 Vol 1 No 5.

If anyone knows of other finds of this nature I would be pleased to hear from them.
Geoffrey Gillam

HELP There are two events in which we would like to participate,
HELP where we can sell publications, attract new members and
HELP keep the public informed of what we are doing. The first event is the ARTS COUNCIL WEEKEND at MILLFIELD HOUSE on July 11th and 12th. It is hoped that most of the societies which make up the Arts Council will take part. There will be dance, drama, music, photography, lectures and films, etc, throughout the Weekend. As well as arranging an exhibition of archaeological material, we propose to hold a bring and-buy sale, the purpose of which will be to raise money for our publication fund. Therefore, if you have any books or small items of bric a brac that you are willing to donate will you please 'phone John Ivens on 886 1375.

Then there is the HISTORY AND CONSERVATION DAY on SUNDAY 6th September also at MILLFIELD HOUSE. This event will again include exhibitions and lectures but we are also trying to encourage each society to present more live action. It has been suggested that we show how finds from an excavation are processed, from potwashing, marking, restoration and identification! Anything is possible if enough help is given.

The degree of success of these events will be determined entirely by the amount of help forthcoming from members. Therefore, if you are willing to come along for three or four hours on one or more of the days in question please telephone Geoffrey Gillam on 367 0263. He would be very pleased to hear from you. The duties are very simple. You hand a membership form to people who look as if they are interested in joining us (and help them fill it in if necessary!) and sell publications to people who want to buy them.

However, irrespective of whether or not you give any help, we look forward to seeing many of you at both events.

CONSERVATION OF ROMAN COFFIN AND BURIAL CANISTERS

The Friends of Enfield Museums are to be congratulated on the series of successful Antique Fairs they have held and where a considerable profit has been made. Part of the proceeds has been used to pay for restoration work on the lead coffin and burial canisters in Forty Hall Museum and these objects are at present undergoing the necessary treatment elsewhere.

The coffin and canisters form one burial group and were discovered in October 1902 during the construction of houses in Burleigh Road Enfield. The coffin is decorated with a cable pattern and a series of scallop shell designs in low relief. It contained the skeleton of an adult in what appears to have been a deposit of gypsum (this was considered to have preservative properties). The canisters, also of lead, contained cremated remains, one of which was identified as that of a child, but there seems little doubt that two children were buried here. They had been placed in a tile cist at the foot of the coffin and covered with many large flints.

Some damage was caused to the coffin by the workmen at the time of discovery and this together with the subsequent deterioration of the lead itself will be remedied during treatment.

The decorated lead coffin and the well-made canisters, together with the method of burial make it probable that the site was originally marked with a substantial funerary monument. No trace of such a feature was noticed at the time it was dug up and, unfortunately, no undisturbed ground remains in the vicinity for any further investigation to be made.

Where the coffin was made is not known but Reginald Smith, reporting on the discovery in the Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries for 1902, notes that the distribution of this type of decorated lead coffin appears to have been confined not only to this country but to Essex and the vicinity of London. Some entrepreneur no doubt produced these and other funerary objects for a local market.

The significance of the cremation burials with an inhumation is a mystery, and no date can be given to the interment except to say that the change in burial custom from cremation to inhumation (probably due to fashion rather than any religious reason) began, in this country at least, during the second half of the second century. Cremation ceased almost entirely by the end of the third century.

These burials, as well as the stone coffins and other items, imply a degree of wealth on the part of the people living here, necessary for the purchase and transportation of these items from elsewhere.

Cato, writing in the second century BC, remarked that the cost of transporting an olive mill, weighing about a ton and a half, by ox-team, for a distance of twentyfive miles was about a sixth of the cost of the mill itself.

Three centuries later the long distances over which very heavy objects such as stone coffins, etc, were moved from the point of manufacture were quite extraordinary. Although the cost would still be high, the efficient and well maintained road system and the availability of carts and wagons for the purpose obviously made such movements much easier and economically possible.

25th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

There was the usual brief business part of the Annual General Meeting at Millfield House on Wednesday 25th March. (Actually it lasted for 15 minutes which is the longest meeting for some years!)

The Financial Statement and the Annual Report were accepted by the members present as was the motion to increase the subscription to two pounds for adults and one pound for juniors with effect from 1st January 1982.

Dr Ild Anthony was again elected President of the Society, and Mrs J Adams, Miss I Drayton, Mr F Gregory and Dr J Kent were re-elected Vice-Presidents.

John Sykes had written from Oxford to say that as he is so far removed from our activities we should remove his name from the list of V-Ps. He asked to be remembered to all his friends in the Society and he made a generous donation to our funds. Messrs Denny and Finlay were not nominated for re-election as they have long since left the area and contact with them has been lost.

The following officers and committee were elected: Chairman, Geoffrey Gillam. Vice-Chairman, Sylvia Collicott. Treasurer, Ian Jones.

Membership Secretary, Gwen Ivens. Meetings Secretary, John Coleman. Editor, John Stevens. Auditor, Arthur Hall. Committee Members, Roger Eddington and John Ivens. Trustees, John Wright and Brian Warren.

The Chairman voiced the thanks of the members to those people who were not seeking re-election for their part in helping to run the Society. To Graham Deal for his work as Editor, To Arthur Hall and Lionel Fereday who had acted as Trustees. To Simon Wood who served as Junior Representative and who frequently helped with the sale of publications. There were no nominations for the posts of General Secretary, Social Secretary and Junior Representative. However, Derek Radden subsequently offered his services as General Secretary, which offer was accepted with alacrity!

At the conclusion of business there was a review of the years work. Ian Jones spoke about his researches into the history of Enfield Palace. He was followed by John Ivens and Geoffrey Gillam who described the fieldwork and observation carried out during 1980.

ERRATUM

A small correction to be made to the report on the "Excavation of Farmland in the Former Parishes of Edmonton and Enfield". On page 418 it is stated that the houses in Upsdell Avenue were constructed between 1926 and 1929. In fact they were built in 1920/21. We are grateful to Mrs Hoy for this information.

Over the Easter weekend the more active types working under Roger Dormer carried out an examination and excavation of a 'crop' mark thought to be either part of Ermine Street, Roman Road, or a roadway constructed during the early part of this century by Mr Cornish in his brickfields.

The mark was first observed by member Mr Les Whitmore some time ago and could be seen running North-South across the football pitch situated on the West side of the school field close to the Cambridge Road.

An area close to the school sand pits was chosen so that the mark could be sectioned and a trench 13m x 3m was first cleared of the overlaying turf, revealing a gravel surface immediately beneath. A machine trench was then cut through this into the natural gravel found at a depth of 1m. This trench also showed that ditches had been cut either side of the gravel road.

The examination of this gravel together with the fragments of Victorian pottery established that it was in fact the roadway of Mr Cornish. As several new members were keen to 'dig' it was treated as a training excavation and was used to give members an insight into this type of work.

The excavation revealed that a roadway 2.98m wide and 0.97m thick consisting of rammed gravel had been laid above the natural gravel, and that ditches had been set either side, the ditch on the East side being 1.97m wide and 1.85m deep, but it was not possible to determine the extent of the ditch on the West side. A secondary surface was visible as well as 'rutting' on the gravel surface which had undergone repairs.

It would seem that the construction of this road had been as follows:-

1. The removal of the 'brickearth' which overlay the natural gravel.
2. Having removed the 'brickearth' a thin layer of gravel road was first laid, which was then added to.
3. The ditches either side of the road were then filled with the surrounding top soil as further areas of brickearth were removed, and the evidence pointed to this having been done in one action.
4. Mr Cornish then had a raised road surface across his brickfields with the maximum amount of brickearth having been removed.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS Mr Hulley, Headmaster. Mr Perry, Caretaker.

Mr Dyster, Education Dept. Society members who assisted especially Alison Stewart, Jeremy Lawrence, Martin Palmer, John Stevens and Les Whitmore who turned up to relay the turf. Finally to Roger Dormer who stood in for me at the last minute to conduct the 'dig'.

As we go to print I am making arrangements for the next 'dig' which is to be at Bush Hill Park School Main Avenue commencing towards the end of June. This is in advance of a new nursery school being built.

John Ivens

NEW MEMBERS

A welcome is offered to the following new members:

Martin Kay, Miss B Cooper, Mr and Mrs Walker, Miss J C Thomson, Miss Alison Stewart, Miss Karen Dear, Miss Marion Baxter, Stewart Knight, Paul Chopping, David Thompson, Jeremy Lawrence, Paul Carter and Miss Julia Hough.

Have you a friend who may be interested in joining the Society? An application form can be obtained by a telephone call to Gwen Ivens on 886 1375.

The change of venue for monthly meetings seems to have resulted in a drop in membership and your assistance in restoring previous membership levels would be appreciated.

PLEA FOR ASSISTANCE

Society Chairman, Geoffrey Gillam is continuing his active researches into the ways in which both World Wars affected Enfield and wishes to document the varying design, construction and usage of air-raid shelters, both public and private (vide his report on the Enfield Grammar school shelter in Society News No.80). Geoff would welcome any information from members on the subject and would be delighted to learn the whereabouts of any hitherto unrecorded shelters which still exist. Geoffrey may be contacted on 367-0263 or at 23Merton Road, Enfield.

JCS.

Society News is published quarterly in March, June, September and December and is free to members. The Editor, to whom articles, letters, comments and criticism should be sent is John C. Stevens, 3 Scarborough Road, London N9. 804-6918.