

Archaeology Around the County

News from local archaeological and historical societies and Harlington Upper School

INTRODUCTION

Bedfordshire is fortunate in having a number of local societies which seek to promote archaeology and related work on historical buildings, and also in having one school, at Harlington, where archaeology is taught to examination level. The following contributions from each society and from Harlington Upper School summarise the range of archaeological groups within the county and their activities. It is intended that in future, Bedfordshire Archaeology will provide a forum for regular, up-to-date reports from local societies. All those contributing to the following article are affiliated to the Bedfordshire Archaeological Council.

AMPTHILL AND DISTRICT ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

Kevan Fadden

The Ampthill and District Archaeological and Local History Society was formed in 1962 from a WEA tutorial given by Dr J. Alexander on archaeology. Local history was included in the scope of the Society in the belief that it would help to stabilise the membership and generate more interest.

The Society meets at 7.45 p.m. on the first Monday of the month from October to April at the White Hart Hotel, Ampthill for a programme of lectures. During the summer occasional trips are arranged to sites of interest. Throughout the year a watching brief is kept on the surrounding area to monitor building and development. Field walking, aerial surveys and small scale excavations are carried out as and when required on threatened sites. The Ampthill by-pass was a good example when more than a dozen new sites were found and recorded.

A history of Flitwick village was produced in 1974 and is now ready for updating; this is the current project for the local history section. Further details can be obtained from the Chairman Kevan Fadden, Ampthill 402273 or Hon. Secretary Brian Lazelle, Ampthill 402264.

BEDFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Ian Freeman

In 1847 the Bedfordshire Archaeological and Architectural Society was founded. This had a number of distinguished members including the Duke of Bedford and Earl de Grey as Presidents. However, forty years on, in 1887, this society appears to have been taken over by the Bedfordshire Natural History Society although F.A. Blaydes Esq. was retained as 'Secretary of the Archaeological Department'. The first annual general meeting of the merged society was held in 1888 and we still number our AGMs from that year. For this reason, we are celebrating our centenary in 1988.

In those early days the emphasis was indeed on natural history rather than archaeology and lectures, which were held about once a week, tended to be on subjects such as 'The Behaviour of Earthworms'. However, the balance gradually changed and by 1918 the title was changed to Bedford Natural History and Archaeological Society. In 1955, when natural historians had other societies to cater for their interests, the title was changed again to Bedford Archaeological Society as it is today.

The aims of the Society as defined on our programme cards reads:

'The objects of the Society shall be to advance the education of the general public in subjects of archaeological or antiquarian interest, particularly those relating to English life and culture, with specific reference to the town and county of Bedford, and including excavations in the field.'

The somewhat Victorian flavour of this declaration betrays our date of origin but the objects are, in general terms, the same today. We do not, however, allow the phrases 'English life and culture' and 'specific reference to the town and county of Bedford' to restrict our activities. The last full-scale 'excavation in the field' undertaken by the Society was in the 1970s at Clapham Manor House, under the direction of Mr Peter Tilson.

More recent activities 'in the field' have concentrated on 'surface archaeology' i.e. surveying and field working. One such exercise at the deserted hamlet of Tilwick in Ravensden was reported in *South Midlands Archaeology* 14 (1984) p 2. A similar exercise at Yelden Church is nearing completion.

We also have an ongoing documentary research programme on the origins of Bedford's streets and street names which is beginning to yield publishable results.

But our main activities involve lectures (once a month during the winter) and outings during the summer. For our lecture programme our policy is to choose speakers who can inform us of the latest developments in archaeology and related topics. For this we draw on professional archaeologists active in Bedfordshire and the neighbouring counties and also, whenever possible, well-known speakers from farther afield. Recent programmes for instance have included Professor John Coles speaking on the Somerset Levels, Dr Christopher Taylor on Landscape Archaeology and Dr Margaret Gelling on place-names.

Our summer outings take the form of car trips to local places of archaeological or historical interest, preferably where some activity is in progress, or coach trips further afield. Our policy here is to try to take our members to places which they would find difficult to visit on their own, either because of distance or accessibility. Popular coach trips of recent years have included Coalbrookdale, the Mary Rose and the Jorvik Centre at York.

Our membership at present is about 70 people. Further details about membership and our current programme can be obtained from our Hon. Secretary Miss Sylvia Woods. Tel. Bedford 65095.

THE HIGHAM FERRERS HUNDRED ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

David Hall

The Society was founded in 1965 with the initial object of recording the archaeology of the Higham Ferrers Hundred, then under threat by building and quarrying. Although lying in Northamptonshire, the Hundred extends the whole length of North Bedfordshire. Fieldwork was also a significant activity with the Society and many parishes in North Bedfordshire were surveyed for pre-medieval sites;

the results have been published in Volumes 3 and 7 of this Journal.

A few rescue excavations in Bedfordshire were also undertaken in the churches of Ravensden and Thurleigh during restoration works, and at Radwell gravel pits; these sites also have been reported in this Journal.

The current interest of the Society is primarily fieldwork and ancillary historical back-up. Some parishes in the south of the county have been investigated, and the Cardington survey is in progress with the help of John Wood.

The Society does not have formal newsletters or regular meetings but members continue fieldwork on most winter weekends. The secretary would like to hear from anyone who would be interested in arranging permission to walk around the fields of a parish.

Secretary: David Hall, The Gables, Raunds Road, Hargrave, Northants. Tel. (home (0933) 625776; office (0223) 333323).

LUTON AND DISTRICT ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

John Burley

The Luton and District Archaeological Society, was formed by James Dyer and Stuart Davison, the Keeper of Archaeology at Luton Museum, in 1986.

The purpose of its formation was to make available a number of volunteers to co-operate with Luton Museum in carrying out field walking and excavations on land threatened by development.

The Society holds a series of lectures each winter between October and May. The subjects are of local, national and international interest. The speakers include well known local and national members of the archaeological world, although usually with some local connection.

During the summer, as well as taking part in any active archaeology that presents itself, a number of field trips are organised to places of archaeological interest.

The officers of The Society include Professor W. H. Manning, President, and James Dyer FSA, Chairman. Since the departure to Scotland of Stuart Davison, the secretary's position has been taken by John Burley, 18 Trinity Road, Luton, Beds. LU3 1TP. Tel. Luton 594072.

MANSHEAD ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF DUNSTABLE

Barry Horne

The Society was formed in 1951 to carry out rescue excavation ahead of chalk quarrying. This threat has now disappeared but the Society continues to excavate in and around Dunstable ahead of building development.

Members meet four times a week (Monday, Wednesday and Friday evenings and Sunday morning) either to excavate or to carry out post excavation work.

Winter lectures are held each month in The Friars on Monday evenings at 7.45 p.m.

In addition there is an annual outing in June; in 1987 it was to Worcester.

Newsletters are produced twice a year in addition to the Manshead Journal which is a report of our excavations and post excavation work. The latest Journal contains a report of a chance Roman find in West Street and a preliminary report of our excavation at Kingsbury Court.

Other publications include *Occupation Sites on a Chiltern Ridge* BAR 29 which reports on the palimpsest of occupation on Puddlehill which stretches from the Neolithic to the Saxon period; and the 'Roman cemetery at Dunstable' published in volume 15 of this Journal.

The Society archive contains many slides in addition to a number of super 8 cine films of our excavations since 1952. One of the films is a detailed record of the reconstruction, by members, at the Chiltern Open Air Museum of one of the Iron Age houses found on Puddlehill. Speakers are available to talk about the prehistory and history of the area.

Our current dig is a trial excavation on the reputed site of the palace of Henry I. Other work includes the detailed analysis of medieval pottery from Dunstable as well as the preparation of reports of earlier excavations.

During the winter months field walking is undertaken as well as visits to local antiquities.

For details of the Society's activities please contact: Barry Horne, Hon. Secretary, 'Beaumont', Church End, Edlesborough, Dunstable, Beds. LU6 2EP. Tel. Eaton Bray 221219.

POTTON HISTORY SOCIETY

Peter Ibbett

The Society was formed on October 13th 1977 and has built up a membership of over 70 people.

AIMS

1. To promote an interest in history and particularly in that of Potton through regular meetings, exhibitions and other activities.
2. To collect, record and publish information on the history of Potton for the benefit of members of the local community.
3. To record current events in Potton for the benefit of future generations.
4. To assist in the general conservation and preservation of the buildings and surrounding countryside.

ACTIVITIES

1. Monthly meetings

The Society meets at the Community Centre, Brook End, every month on the fourth Thursday (except December, which has an earlier date).

The programme features a blend of visiting speakers and Society generated topics. Regular events of the Society programme are talks by its own active members as well as Research Evenings, Town Walks and Pictorial Entertainments.

Meetings usually commence at 8.00 p.m. Visitors are always welcome. Any changes will be announced in the local press. Membership is only £3.50 (Family £6.00, Senior Citizen £1.00).

2. Exhibitions

The Society has collected an archive of over 3,000 photographs of past and present activities in the town. Most of these have been mounted and captioned and are regularly exhibited in Society Meetings and at other local events. The Society also maintains a collection of documents and printed material.

3. Projects

The Society has an active core of members dedicated to researching both past and present events in the town. Projects to which members have contributed include a photographic collection, taped memories, scrapbooks, the indexing of censuses 1851-1881, a film archive 'Past and Present', a gravestone survey, cars of Potton Manor, Trade Directories 1785-1940, Potton Consolidated

Charities, Parish Registers and two audio-visual programmes 'the Great Fire of Potton' and 'Decade of Change 1977-1987'.

4. Publications

The Society has gained much praise for its publications: *Potton* (Yates, 1979), *Picture of Potton* (Yates/Parry, Volume 1,* 1981 and Volume 2, 1985) and research reports: *Potton Market Square* (Ibbett, 1981, revised edition 1987), *The Great Fire of Potton** (Ibbett, 1983) and *Potton Consolidated Charities* (Yates, 1985).

Society contact and publication sales: Mrs Patricia Yates, Secretary, 31A Royston Street, Potton. Tel. 260328.

*Denotes publications not available.

ARCHAEOLOGY AT HARLINGTON

Jo Constantine

The study of Archaeology to examination level continues to flourish at Harlington Upper School. The long-established and much respected archaeology teacher, Mr James Dyer, retired in 1985 but has maintained close links with the department, keeping a paternal eye on its development.

Until the end of the summer term 1987 courses offered included East Anglian Board CSE Mode 3, London Board A/O level and Cambridge Board A level. Most students entered for these examinations in 1986 and 1987 received certificates. Special congratulations are due to Mr David Ward of Harlington who, as a mature student sat in on the 6th form lessons for three years and despite ill health in his second year completed a personal research project on the Mesolithic Period in Bedfordshire. Mr Ward achieved Grade C in his A level examinations.

From September 1987 students in the fourth year will be beginning the new London and East Anglian Board GCSE examination in Archaeology; one-

year Sixth formers will be studying for London Board A/O level, and there are new 'A' level students also beginning their studies.

Close links with the County Archaeologists have been forged by the Sixth form A level students using the sites and monuments records, and local sites and excavated material for their project research. One of the students, who sat her examination in June 1987, used previously unpublished Roman pottery from Deepdale as the basis of her 'A' level project. More work of this nature is being fostered in the department particularly now that GCSE students must also produce an individual study to complete examination requirements. The 1987-89 GCSE group are presenting their individual studies as a complete work *Aspects of Archaeology in Bedfordshire* with each child contributing a chapter on a topic which particularly interests them.

The scope of GCSE projects is tremendous, encouraging students of 14 and 15 to become involved in surveys, field-walking exercises, artefact studies and excavation, under responsible supervision. Although few students continue with Archaeology once they have left Harlington, many of them retain an interest in archaeology and in Britain's archaeological heritage. Although residential field work away from Bedfordshire appears to be curtailed by the new conditions under which teachers must work, local field studies will continue. In some ways this will be a better arrangement as the students will come to know their home county well, and may have a better understanding of local planning problems where archaeology and development issues conflict.

The Archaeology Department at Harlington is now poised to begin a new era. Humanities in the school is changing, with an integrated Humanities course in the first year being taught in modular fashion. Links between the various Humanities disciplines are being stressed and Archaeology is contributing to many of the modules. At the same time the Archaeology units point out the obvious links with the Sciences, thus preparing students for the variety of skills they will be developing in the GCSE course.