



East Dorset Antiquarian Society

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NEWSLETTER - DECEMBER 2008

We wish all our members and their families a VERY Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year



Recent Events

Last EDAS Lecture

At our last EDAS lecture Paul Cheetham of Bournemouth University talked to us about Forensic Archaeology. Paul told us that the term 'forensic archaeology' was widely and improperly used on many television programmes (not mentioning any names!) The term 'forensic' actually derives from 'of the Forum', i.e. the Roman Law Courts. Forensic archaeology is solely about investigation and excavation to solve crimes, and it is also a popular subject at the university itself (if a somewhat gruesome one). Paul has himself been involved in many forensic cases in Britain and abroad.

Although many standard archaeological skills are required for both types of work, the approach of searching for evidence of a crime, as opposed to investigating an archaeological site, is very different. In standard archaeology we might expect a widespread, and possibly long term, excavation of a large area (e.g. Mortimer Wheeler's investigations at hillforts). Many, very general questions will be asked, such as "What date was the site first occupied and for how long?"; "How large was the estimated population?", etc. In contrast, forensic investigation is designed to answer a few, very specific questions such as "has a body been buried in this back garden?" Before the main question itself is actually posed there are other circumstantial assessments, such as looking for any disturbance in the garden around the time of the disappearance. This might be seen as sunken soil, or natural indicators such as strong nettle growth. Also, "is there any unusual or useful information from neighbours?" The whole purpose of these questions is to narrow down the final investigation to a small 'keyhole' excavation, normally performed as a vertical section to investigate the stratigraphy. Paul gave us one example of a body found buried under a car park; a recently laid drain and a buried sweet packet (dateable) lay above and below the body, sealing it in a very narrow time frame.

Although it is an unfortunate fact that forensic archaeology needs to take place, at least the many archaeological principles, methods and skills that have been developed over hundreds of years can directly help in the pursuit of justice.

We thank Paul for a very interesting lecture which gave us a completely different perspective of this type of archaeology.

EDAS Field Trip 2009

Included in with this Newsletter you will find a reply slip for next year's Field Trip. This is based in Somerset and Gloucestershire, and is being organised by Rob Fenwick. See the previous November Newsletter for a provisional list of the sites to be visited.

A REMARKABLE CONNECTION

A little while ago a friend gave me a small collection of bits and pieces he had found metal detecting in a field at Gussage All Saints. Amongst these a small brass hinge, probably from an item of luggage, caught my eye as it appeared to have been inscribed. Closer inspection revealed it was the owner's name and home town, Sarum, engraved in fine copper plate script. However, I couldn't clearly decipher the name although the prefix of Gen showed he was a military gentleman. I decided with the Sarum (Salisbury) connection it was worth leaving it at the museum there for David Algar to examine. I know from previous experience that David has a vast knowledge of artefacts, coins and history relating to the Salisbury area.

I was not to be disappointed as David was able to provide me with a fascinating story regarding the owner of this seemingly mundane artefact. The inscription read *Gen Schrapnel SARUM*. Henry Schrapnel was born in 1761 into a family whose home was at Midway Manor, Bradford on Avon. He had a career in the Royal Artillery rising to the rank of Major General. His invention of a devastating exploding shell was a major contribution to the success of the coalition against Napoleon in the Peninsular War. Apparently he spent about £30,000 of his own money on armament research and was never adequately compensated by the British Government. His name has passed into the language as a term for shell fragments. He is recorded as leasing the King's House, now the home of Salisbury Museum, in 1785. He was probably there for many years as the hinge probably relates to this period and he is unlikely to have been a General at the age of 24, although further research should sort this out. He died at Peartree House, Southampton in 1842 and is buried in the family vault in Bradford on Avon.

It has taken some 200 years for this piece to return to the King's House!

Martin Green

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

The dates for EDAS events are underlined. The monthly evening lectures start at 7.30pm. Walks and field visits usually meet at 10.30 am at the published Grid Reference. Ring the leader if the weather is doubtful or if more details are required.

2008

Wed 10 Dec EDAS Lecture: **The South Dorset Ridgeway** with Andy Payne of English Heritage.

2009

Wed 14 Jan EDAS Lecture: **The Prehistory of Hengistbury Head** with Peter Hawes.

Wed 11 Feb EDAS Lecture: **An update on the Knowlton Project** with John Gale of Bournemouth University.

Wed 11 Mar EDAS lecture: **The Black Death in Dorset** with Dr Mark Forrest of the Dorset Local History Centre.

Wed 25 Mar **EDAS AGM** followed by a talk by an EDAS member. More details to follow.

Wed 8 Apr EDAS lecture: **The Cranborne Ancient Technology Centre** with Luke Winter. Note: **Venue to be confirmed.**