



# East Dorset Antiquarian Society

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**NEWSLETTER - SEPTEMBER 2009**

## **PERSONALIA**

We are sorry to hear that Steve Bungay has had a motor cycle accident resulting in several broken bones; though he is making recovery this is slow and mobility is very restricted. Corinne also is unwell. We wish them both improved health and hope that it will not be long before we see them both at lectures and trowing in trenches.

## **RECENT EVENTS**

### **Walk around Christchurch Commons on Sunday 23 August.**

14 members, a member's friend, a dog and a baby in a back carrier joined our members Sue Newman and Mike Tizzard for this walk. Sue started by telling us the history of Town Common. The land is owned by the Malmesbury Estates and residents of the old Borough of Christchurch have various rights on the Commons. Amongst these are turbarry (right to cut turves for fires), estover (right to collect fallen wood etc for firewood) and pasture (right to put out animals to graze). We then walked uphill to some cottages. Originally, people put farm wagons on the common in which they lived. Shortly after, walls were built around the wagon and a roof and chimney added. Provided that the fire was not allowed to go out they could then establish themselves as residents. The wagon was then removed from inside the new dwelling. Most cottages we saw have replaced or encased the original dwellings and many are much grander.

Further up, after passing a gun club where rifles were being fired, we saw evidence of where in the 1920s and 1930s sand and gravel had been extracted from the Common with the result that some tumuli were completely obliterated. There are still a number of barrows but these are now difficult to spot as trees have been allowed to encroach as animals are no longer grazed there.

Near the top of the Common was a small piece of concrete poking through the grass. This is the only visible evidence of the underground Cold War bunker which existed from 1950 to 1991 when it was decommissioned. Our next stop was at an area which is the possible site of a Roman signal station. Later a chapel was built there around 1302 which was licensed in 1332 and presumably ceased at the Reformation. There is now nothing to be seen. There were excavations in 1807 and 1863 but documentary evidence is scant and the location of any finds is unknown. A later dig was by Hayward Sumner and even he does not appear to have left notes. The last dig was c1967 and never was written up.

We then moved on to 2 modern concrete reservoirs constructed in 1930 and 1960. They each hold 2 million gallons and are fed by water pumped up from the Avon. Walking further around the hill various banks and tumuli were pointed out. Many of the tumuli have been damaged either by sand extraction or by motorbikes being ridden over them. There are some dramatic views from the hill, in particular of the Avon winding its way through the valley, of Hengistbury Head and in the distance the Isle of Wight.

We then descended and walked to Cowards' Common. Cowards is a corruption of Cowherds. This is 69 acres of river meadow grazing by the Avon which is still used by commoners today for their cattle.

If you want to know more about Christchurch Commons then why not buy Sue and Mike's book 'The Christchurch Commons - history and walks' (2007). This is a large format 77 page book with many illustrations and can be bought direct from the authors or from bookshops or direct from the publisher, Natula, online, <http://www.natula.co.uk/HowToOrder.htm>

Peter Walker

## **FORTHCOMING EVENTS**

### **Walk around Corfe Village and Corfe Castle on Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> September**

Our member Nancy Grace will lead this walk which will start at 10.30 from the Visitor Centre on the road into Corfe. Grid Ref. SY950825. Parking there is free for National Trust (NT) members. Non-members can use the public layby on the Church Knoyle road which is the right turn about 100 yards past the Visitor Centre.

Nancy will talk about the village as we walk through it to the Common to look at the sites there. We will be hunting for Mesolithic flints in the erosion scars on the Common! We will then return back through the Halves. The walk will take approximately 1¾ hours.

After lunch, which can be had at a number of establishments in the village, Nancy will provide a guided tour of the Castle at 1.45pm. This will take 2 hours and entry is free to NT members. Non-members pay the usual £5.90 (Gift Aid Admission) or £5.36 (Standard Admission). Many members will be aware that Nancy is an archaeologist for the NT at Corfe Castle. At the end of the tour you might want to enjoy afternoon tea in the garden of the NT tearooms where there is a splendid view of the castle. You can contact Peter Walker (01425 471326 or email [peter@peterwalker.info](mailto:peter@peterwalker.info)) if you have queries regarding either of the events.

### **Wimborne Square Archaeological Investigation**

Members will be aware that the local authority propose to pedestrianise part of Wimborne Square and this society is to undertake some associated excavation. The date for this has been moved from September to **Monday 19<sup>th</sup> October**, over a three day period. In the first instance council workmen will remove the overlying road surface in a 1.2 metre square, then we will excavate from the road surface to a depth of 60 cm. The Square is known to have been the site of a cemetery and St. Peters Church, but the boundaries of neither are known. The main objective of the excavation is to record any features that reveal its past use as a burial ground, thus helping to determine its boundaries, and to see if any evidence of the church exists.

Although the pits will be relatively shallow previous evidence indicates that the burials, some 400 hundred, are close to the surface.

This is the most administratively complicated project we have ever undertaken. Important aspects are the legal process of excavating on such a site, and the potential for exposing human remains considerable, despite the smallness of the area. It is not intended to remove skeletons though disarticulated bones will be removed for osteoarchaeological assessment.

We will be exposed to public and journalistic views with wide opinions as to the ethics of such a project. The whole project must be associated with respect to the dead. To help ensure that we are not misrepresented any discussions with onlookers will be taken by Lilian Ladle or me, with Lilian as the primary person.

While this may seem bureaucratic, members will realise that such a project can cause emotional upheaval in some people and unguarded comments may cause undesirable publicity.

We thank the staff and volunteers at the Priest House Museum for the help and advice already given and that promised.

John

## Field week 2010

This is an early notice for next year's field week to let you put it into your diary. After considering various options we have decided that next year's field week will be in North Wales and as usual will be in June from Saturday the 12th to Saturday the 19th. Plans are in the very early stages at the moment but there is plenty to do; lots of castles, standing stones and circles, a prehistoric copper mine and much more for us to look into. We have not yet decided exactly where we will be based in North Wales as we still have to decide on the most convenient location. We will keep you up to date with progress in later newsletters. We are not collecting names at the moment but if you think you might be interested please let us know.

Mo & Mac Houghton

## Digging at Vindolanda

I recently (25<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> July 2009) had the great pleasure of becoming a Vindolanda volunteer for the first time and had a wonderful week digging in the north western corner of stone fort 2.

After the introductions and a brief tour of the current work we were divided up into teams and I was allocated to a small team to excavate the next section of the road which runs inside the northern rampart. It was expected that we would find an Oven used by the soldiers to cook their meals, as they weren't allowed to cook in barracks.



The turf had already been removed so we started removing the topsoil by spade but very soon came down onto some large "flag stones" so cleaned back at that level to investigate. Alex (our supervisor) decided it was not a significant context so we carried on down.

There were plenty of sherds of pottery, mostly Black Burnished ware (all the way from Dorset like me!) and some nice pieces of Samian. We also found some very fine pottery which Alex identified as Castor ware.

I was working at the left hand (southern) end of our section and started finding burnt material and lots more pot and bone, indicating that we were near to the oven. I was also delighted to find my first ever roman coin! It was a 2C brass sestertius (according to Andy) but was heavily corroded so no indication of who was on it. Later in the day I also found a small copper Bow Brooch which was complete apart from the pin. That really was a good day and although I was very tired at the end of it I went back to the campsite very happy!

The next day we continued trowling and I gradually came down onto a layer of large horizontal flagstones and one or two surrounding stones showing signs of intense heat. Further along the road Alex and Andy removed a section of the rampart to try to find signs of the other edge of the oven but other than a few more flags there was no further evidence of it.



Our team (Jane, Shona, Ashley and me) continued work into the rampart and two more coins were found along with a decorative copper stud and a small copper bowl, three quarters complete, with only some crushing, found on the road surface. I also found a hexagonal stone storage jar lid with a hole drilled in the centre.

At the one end of the section Jane came upon a mass of rubble in what appeared to be a cut. Andy suggested that it was a backfilled victorian trench which had destroyed some of the rampart but was nevertheless interesting to see.



The final day was a lot wetter than the rest of the week (although there had been some showers, mostly at lunch time) so we tidied up as best we could before the rain turned the surfaces into mud.

Having since seen a photo of a similar oven found at Housesteads I believe we did find the remains of the oven which had been partially destroyed by earlier excavation. It could be that the flags we found on the first day were part of the original base of the oven which had been lifted.

I had a wonderful week digging with a great team at an amazing site and will

certainly be back again next year for some more exciting archaeology.

Steve Smith

### **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.

#### **2009**

- Wed 9 Sep EDAS Lecture: "**Archaeology of the New Forest and its Coast**" with Frank Green, Archaeologist at the New Forest National Park Authority.
- Sun 20 Sep **Walk around Corfe Village and Castle** with Nancy Grace. See earlier for more details.
- Wed 14 Oct EDAS Lecture: "**The Wyndhams of Dinton Park, a house born out of riots, the chase, and fine red wines**" with James Grasby
- Sat 19 Oct **Wimborne Square Archaeological Investigation**. Please see earlier for more details.
- Wed 11 Nov EDAS Lecture: "**Town life in Roman Britain**" with Dr Louise Revell of Southampton University.
- Wed 9 Dec EDAS Lecture: "**Easter Island**" with Dr Kate Welham of Bournemouth University.

#### **2010**

- Wed 13 Jan EDAS Lecture: "**Cerne Abbas**" with Rob Curtis, Blue Badge Guide
- Wed 10 Feb EDAS Lecture: "**Tarrant Monkton**" with Jeremy Webster.
- Sat 12 – 19 June **EDAS Field Trip 2010** to North Wales. More details to follow