East Dorset Antiquarian Society

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NEWSLETTER – November 2023

Welcome to dark evenings again. When will we get rid of the awful changing of the clocks? There are only so many hours of daylight in a day, so it's either dark in the morning or in the evening, whatever we do (a personal view of course).

The last lecture was by Antony Firth on **The Historic Character of the River Stour.** My thanks to Phil for the summary here, particularly as I missed what was, by all accounts, a fascinating talk.

The next lecture is, of course, at St Catherine's Church Hall. This month it will be Tom Cousins from Bournemouth University on *The marine archaeology of Poole Bay*, a subject spanning most of our seafaring history. That's on Wednesday 8th November at 7:30pm.

Many thanks to those who braved the weather to visit Christchurch Priory a couple of weeks ago, but particularly to Robin Dumbreck for organising this special tour: **EDAS 'Explorers' at Christchurch Priory, 18th October 2023**. Robin has kindly written the article about the event, which may inspire your own visit if, like me, you couldn't be there – though it may be possible to do it again next Spring.

The articles by Vanessa and me celebrating our 40th anniversary are now in their 7th month (of 10). In this newsletter there are short pieces on the **Minster Church, Wimborne**; **The Cobb, Lyme Regis**; **Maiden Castle** and **Max Gate, Dorchester**.

Alan Dedden has, for the 61st time, provided his **Weblinks** and **Weblink Highlights**. I always follow the links to learn about subjects I didn't realise that I was interested in. 'View from Above' is back, and now on its 57th outing thanks to Sue Newman and Jo Crane: **Snail Down and Sidbury Hillfort**. And there's **From the Archives 13**, reviewing the Dorset Proceedings from the mid-1890s.

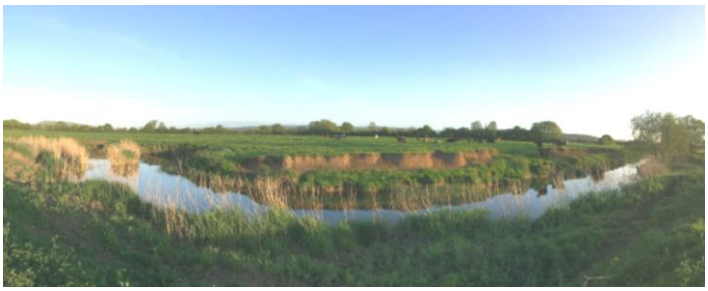
The **EDAS Programme** and **District Diary** complete the newsletter, as always, but before that there's an article on castles. A while back I was sorting and discarding University papers from years ago and came across an essay with facts I'd mostly forgotten. It became four articles of a couple of pages each, which I hope I've managed to update. The first one is here: **Early castles in Britain 1**.

We are working on updating the EDAS website, and many of its photographs will be new. Wherever possible and relevant they will show EDAS events with, of course, EDAS members. No-one will be named, but please let me know if you would object to being shown.
(Photographs may include children, though none will be identifiable unless permission has been granted.)

We are also starting to work on the lecture programme for 2024-25. If you've seen or heard of someone who might make a good speaker for EDAS, please let me know.

Geoff Taylor

The Historic Character of the River Stour: Lecture by Dr Antony Firth

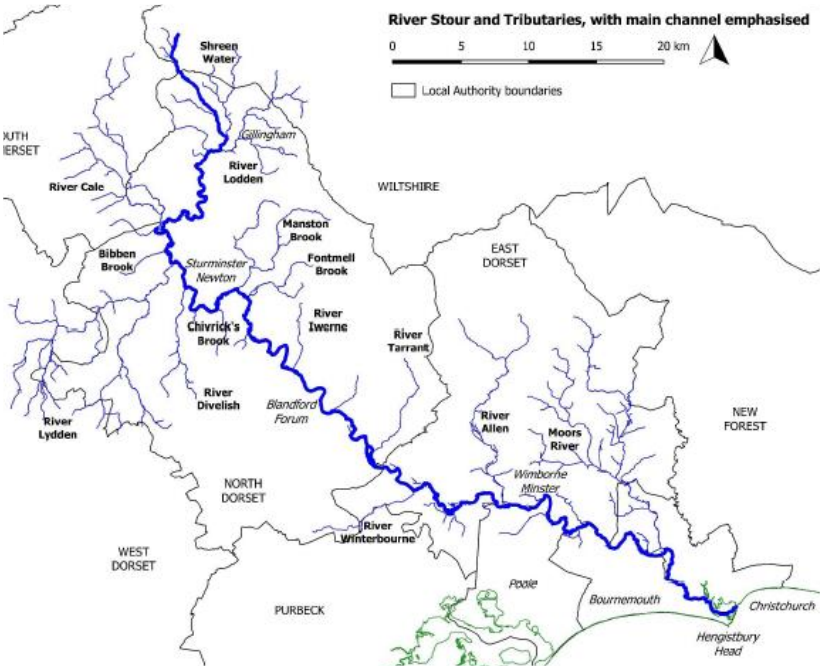


Drawing upon his background as a marine archaeologist, and experience of a pilot project for Historic England, Antony provided us with a perspective of the Stour's changing character from prehistoric to modern times. The methodology for mapping its historic assets, developed by his company Fjordr Ltd., involved building a multi-layered set of data from a variety of sources. These included modern Ordnance Survey information, archaeological data, Historic Environment Records, data on flooding, LiDAR and old tithe and estate maps. From them it is possible to recognise the key areas of human interaction with the environment in river valleys and watercourses.

The practical value of the findings isn't confined to their contribution to the historic record, but includes applications to environmental challenges such as flood control, water quality issues, changes in habitat and countryside management. Dr Firth and his wife, Emma, have been working with the Plain Meadows Partnership, studying where and why good habitat quality has survived, and with a lottery funded partnership with BCP Council considering the creation of a park along the Stour Valley from Hengistbury Head to Shapwick.

Rivers and their valleys are strongly affected by human interventions and cultural practices, such as the effects of agriculture, industry and domestic activity, with evidence from physical traces that still survive or can be found in the historical record. Information from archaeological fieldwork may prove valuable, although is clearly limited from within the actual watercourses unless dried out or changed course. Examples of finds relevant to projects of this type within current or previous watercourses do exist, including the remains of flat-bottomed river vessels from prehistoric, Roman and later periods. For example, the Bronze Age Dover log boat was discovered in a dried-up river tributary.

The pilot project on the Stour concentrated on the main channel and its catchment, excluding tributaries. It looked at the full length of the river and identified 730 distinct places where features relating to human activity could be found. This work has made it more straightforward for those involved in river management to recognise vulnerable sites, and to be able to access all relevant data in a holistic way. Detailed information about specific assets is recorded on a database which allows multiple features in particular locations to be recognised and protected.



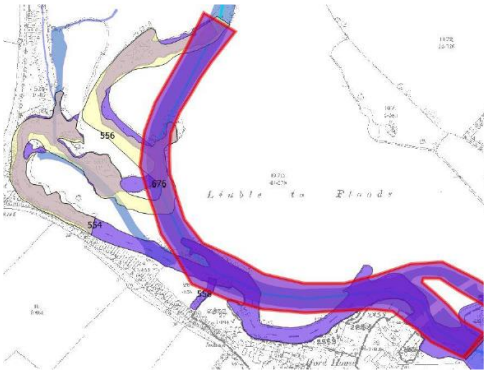
Major changes to the course and flow of rivers first took place during the Neolithic period, when deforestation close to watercourses started in earnest as communities became more settled and domestic agricultural practices emerged. The resultant erosion of soil from hill slopes, which led to the build-up of alluvium in river valleys, began the process of significantly changing many watercourse landscapes into the flat-bottomed flood plains we see today. Water control and management is, therefore, key to the protection of historic assets in a rapidly

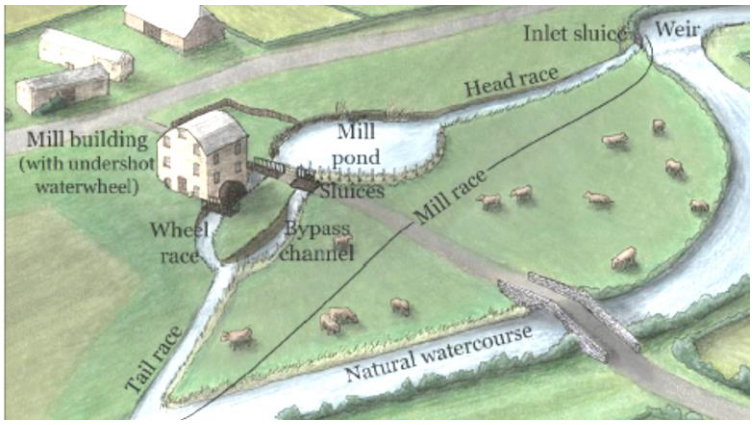
changing environment. Antony was clear that 'returning' these landscapes to 'how they were in the distant past' is not a practical proposition because of the sheer quantity of alluvium deposited, despite this mantra being recently expressed as a desired outcome by the Environment Agency.

The importance of the Stour as a resource providing access to water for domestic use, agriculture, transport, trade and communication during prehistoric times should not be underestimated. Human activity at a string of Iron Age hillforts in the Stour Valley, including Hambledon, Hod and Dudsbury, was supported by the presence of the river, enabling communities to flourish. Heavy or bulky goods, such as quernstones, could be transported upstream and downstream far from their places of origin, sometimes through the port at Hengistbury Head. The importance of settlement connections to the river, as a part of the prehistoric environment serving such places, has sadly never been recognised by inclusion within the ancient monument schedules. For example, the obvious link (reconstruction shown) at Dudsbury (West Parley) remains unscheduled and, hence, unprotected.

The use of the Stour as a transport link continued until comparatively recent times. For example, a report of 1831 considered the river to be navigable as far as Shillingstone – 40km from Christchurch Harbour (clearly longer along the river).

Of the 730 distinct places where features were recorded, one of the most interesting (and second most common) was 'crossings', including road bridges, footbridges, ferries and fords. In some cases the course of rivers has altered, for example three times in the 19th century at Iford (shown), where one of the original bridges became redundant. In other places it is assumed that there would have been ancient crossings, with probable examples near Eye Bridge (Wimborne) and Shapwick on the line of Roman roads. Ferry crossings also served local communities, such as those at Blackwater, linking the village of Holdenhurst with Fairmile, and further down river at Wick, providing access to Christchurch Quay and Priory. Interestingly, some of the river crossings are marked by Bronze Age barrows – rare on floodplains – suggesting that their origins may date back into prehistory.

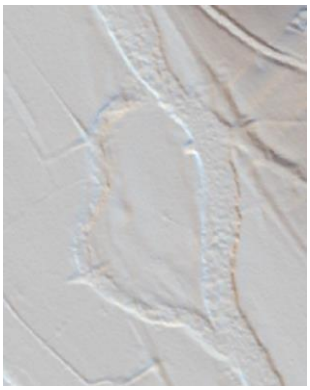




Another set of common historic assets along the courses of rivers are mills, with the Stour being no exception. They provide a good example of where humans have manipulated and altered watercourses to meet their needs. The use of leats and ponds to direct and control river flow is evident in many places. Mill structures often survive, such as the man-made embankments at the NT managed White Mill at Sturminster Marshall. We know that the Romans developed water mill technology, and it's likely that the origin of some mills was during the Roman period in Britain.

Domesday records suggest that most communities along rivers in the Middle Ages developed mills to make flour. Although many of the buildings are no longer visible, their imprint survives in abandoned inlets that were formerly leats, and in small islands such as near France Farm, Bryanston, shown below in

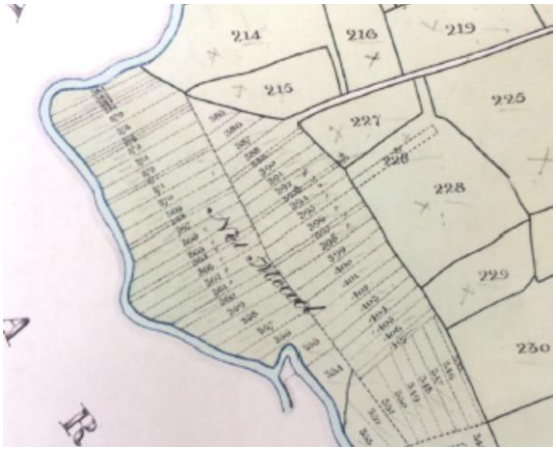
a LiDAR image. Fords used to control the flow of rivers, especially those in apparently isolated locations, may also give clues to the location of former mills, as well as about crossing places.



The introduction of designed landscapes by wealthy landowners often altered not only the course of rivers, but entire waterfronts. Probably the most illuminating along the Stour is at Bryanston, near Blandford, where the estate owners created landscaped gardens and waterways (left) in the late 18th century, on land that was previously meadowland and a mill. The transformation was stark and, though much of the landscape was altered subsequently, evidence of the major changes to the main Stour channel remains alongside the archaeology that must exist.

Not far downstream, at Langton Long near Blandford St Mary, there is a straight stretch of river that can only have been man made, though its purpose is, as yet, unknown. Unexplained features like this provide a fascinating source of research for historians and archaeologists, and highlighting them to bodies like the Environment Agency can only improve their chances of survival in the long term.

The largest proportion of historic assets on the Stour found during the pilot project were related to agriculture, unsurprising with the rich nature of the alluvium in the river valley and the rural nature of the landscape. These are, though, probably the most vulnerable to changes in the environment, with the greatest need of being recorded and protected. Use of LiDAR has proved very effective in identifying former patterns of land use and practice on land adjacent to the river. In contrast to tributaries of the Stour such as the River Allen, where there are examples of water meadows, field systems like that near Gillingham (right) show that flood plain meadows, with individual allocations of land, were used by whole communities to help support a subsistence economy. As well as growing hay, use for grazing is evidenced by animal 'droves' from higher ground fanning out into the flood plain meadows.



Giving livestock access to fresh water was obviously important, and this sign near Sturminster Marshall shows one approach. Of course, people also needed access to water, so settlement along watercourses was common before the introduction of piped and pressurised water systems. With many communities on the edges of floodplains, and subject to seasonal flooding, the practical need not to carry water far often overcame the downside of potential flooding. Attitudes towards flood management have obviously changed over the centuries!

Many thanks to Dr Firth for an interesting and illuminating talk, highlighting the wide range of historical features to be found along our local river. Their report for Historic England, 'Historic Watercourses: Developing a method for Identifying the historic character of watercourses: River Stour, Dorset', is online at https://historicengland.org.uk/research/results/reports/273-2020

Phil D'Eath

PS: Antony mentioned that you can find historical Ordnance Survey maps covering the whole of Britain down to parish level, and several other sets of maps, free on the 'Library of Scotland' website at https://maps.nls.uk/ - a very useful resource for the researchers amongst us!

EDAS 'Explorers' at Christchurch Priory, 18th October 2023

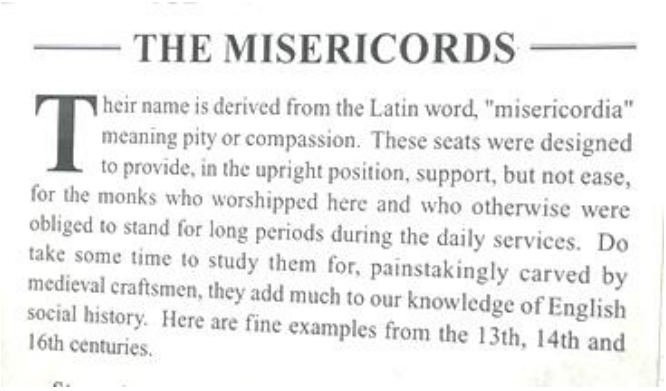
Our group of 17 EDAS members met promptly at Christchurch Priory on an extremely wet and windy day (not so obvious in the photograph), to be greeted by our guides, Hilary, James and Colin who would conduct our tour. Unfortunately, due to the extreme weather, we were unable to climb the tower as it would have been too dangerous. There wouldn't have been any rewarding views from the top anyway, nor could we get closer to see the unusual salmon weathervane on the tower.

The group was split into three and our guides explained the sequence of construction of the Priory, the changes brought about by Henry VIII's Reformation and the more recent restorations in Victorian times. We toured the church interior and also two crypts. There is possible evidence of some Roman columns incorporated into the south transept.

This church is the longest parish church in England, larger than some of our cathedrals. The church, without the monastery buildings, was fortunately saved from sale or destruction in the 16th century by the last Augustinian Prior, John Draper. He was able to use his influence with Henry VIII, and the church was given to the parishioners of Christchurch on the condition that the monastery buildings around were demolished.

The priory has a vast 4,000 pipe organ, originally built in 1788, though some of the pipes have been restored and some have been added over the years. The most recent restoration was completed in 1998, assisted by a large payment from the Arts Council for Capital Lottery Funding. It now has a beautiful English Oak frame with spotted metal front pipes.

The church has a full set of 12 bells, some dating from 1370, plus a smaller communion chime. These are some of the finest and grandest bells, which are really worth seeing and hearing. The Great Quire within the priory is famous for its misericords, which are in extremely good condition despite their medieval origins, the oldest having been carved in 1210. While much of the medieval woodwork was stripped out during the Commonwealth period, fortunately it wasn't destroyed and could be re-instated later.



THE MISERICORDS

Their name is derived from the Latin word, "misericordia" meaning pity or compassion. These seats were designed to provide, in the upright position, support, but not ease, for the monks who worshipped here and who otherwise were obliged to stand for long periods during the daily services. Do take some time to study them for, painstakingly carved by medieval craftsmen, they add much to our knowledge of English social history. Here are fine examples from the 13th, 14th and 16th centuries.

Following the tour we were directed to the café attached to the south side of the priory for a substantial and very enjoyable cream tea to conclude our visit. The café is, of course, open to visitors to the church, which also has weekly organ recitals and many other musical events.

Christchurch Priory doesn't receive any money from the Government or from the Church Commissioners, and needs support to survive into the future. Full details of visiting and of their events are on the website at https://www.christchurchpriory.org/. And, since this tour was curtailed because of the weather, it may be possible to visit next Spring and complete the more adventurous parts of the tour – visiting the roof void and climbing the tower. If you're interested, watch out for an email.

I would like to thank those who could come on the day for making it the successful event that it was.
(Photo credits: author except misericords by Jackie Dumbreck)

Robin Dumbreck

The Cobb, Lyme Regis (VJ)

The iconic 'Cobb' on the west side of the town is Grade I listed. Curving out into the sea, it has been of great economic importance to the town as a breakwater, preventing coastal erosion and providing a safe harbour to facilitate trade. The Cobb enabled Lyme to develop both as a major port and a centre of shipbuilding from the 13th century onwards.

The first written mention of the Cobb is in a 1328 document describing it as having been damaged by storms. Originally constructed from oak piles driven into the seabed and infilled with boulders, it has been destroyed or severely damaged several times, including being swept away in 1377, leading to the destruction of 50 boats and 80 houses (the date of the drawing isn't known). The small harbour actually made Lyme Regis a major port, the second largest in Dorset in the 14th century. By Elizabethan times Lyme ships were sailing all over the known world. In 1677, customs receipts were greater than those at Liverpool. Eventually, though, the Cobb became too shallow for larger ships and the harbour declined from 1700. It still saw several hundred ships a year in the early 19th century, and coastal trade didn't end until 1914.

The Cobb was cut off from the land at high tide until 1756 after many attempts to join it to the shore were washed away. In 1857 a more robust connection was finally established, and much of what we see today was constructed in the late 18th and 19th centuries using massive blocks of Portland stone.

The origins of the name are obscure and over the years several theories have been advanced. Historian George Roberts, whose history of Lyme was first published in 1823, suggested the structure 'derives its name from the cobble stone of which it is composed', but it has also been argued that the name is derived from the Scandinavian word *kobbe*, meaning a rounded stony island.

Jane Austen visited Lyme Regis at least twice, in 1803 and 1804, and The Cobb is the setting for Louisa Musgrove to fall from steps known locally as "Granny's Teeth" in *Persuasion.* John Fowles, author of *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, lived in Lyme. His heroine, dressed in a black cloak and staring out to sea from the end of a windswept Cobb, remains an iconic image from the 1981 five-time Oscar-nominated film. However, it seems that a real storm was so violent that it was too dangerous for Meryl Streep to stand on the top of the High Wall, and Art Director Terry Pritchard stood in for her in the famous scene.

Max Gate, Dorchester (GT)

Thomas Hardy, Dorset's most famous literary son, designed the house, and it was built in 1885 by his father and brother, then extended ten years later, with further additions subsequently. The plot, just beyond the bypass east of Dorchester, covers about 1.5 acres and includes half of the Neolithic 'Flagstones' enclosure, with the Mount Pleasant henge (May newsletter) a few hundred metres to the east. Evidence of Iron Age and Roman occupation, including burials, was found in the grounds. The grounds also contain the grave of Wessex, Hardy's notoriously bad-tempered Wire Fox Terrier.

The house name was a pun on the name of a nearby toll house – Mack's Gate. Hardy was keen on his privacy and the house was surrounded with high walls and, it is said, a thousand pine trees were planted. By the time of his death in 1928 they cut out the light so much that his second wife, Florence (née Dugdale), had them cut down. She also sold most of the furniture, but continued to live at Max Gate until her death in 1937. Presumably the house then passed to Hardy's sister, Kate, as she gave it to the National Trust in 1940, with the stipulation that it continued to be lived in (which it has!).

Hardy had used three rooms as studies at different periods over the 43 years he lived at Max Gate, where he wrote Tess of the d'Urbervilles, Jude the Obscure and The Mayor of Casterbridge, as well as a good deal of his poetry. The National Trust opened some rooms for visitors in 1994, and further ones in 2011. Over the years they have recreated the rooms as best they can to reflect how they might have looked in Hardy's time, using period furniture, including some of Hardy's own that they have managed to obtain. The recreation of his third study at Max Gate, used for the longest period, is pictured here. Another recreation can also be found in the 'Hardy's Dorset' gallery at Dorchester Museum, including his desk and some personal belongings.

Not just a tribute to this literary giant, Max Gate gives an insight into Victorian and Edwardian England. Hardy's Cottage, where he was born and grew up, is also a National Trust property, just over 2 miles north-east.

The Minster Church, Wimborne (VJ)

The Minster Church of St Cuthburga has been a centre for pilgrimage, prayer and worship in Wimborne Minster for hundreds of years. Cuthburga, sister of King Ine of Wessex, founded a Benedictine Nunnery around 705 AD. 500 nuns are reputed to have lived there, many of whom followed St. Boniface as missionaries to then pagan Germany. The nunnery was destroyed by the Danes in 1013.

Wimborne Minster was an important place for the House of Wessex by the 9th century, when Alfred made it the burial place of his brother King Æthelred in 871 according to the Anglo-Saxon Chronical. A further entry in the Chronicle for 962 records that King Sigeferth killed himself and his body was buried at Wimborne Minster. The suggestion is that Sigeferth was a Scandinavian king imprisoned at Wimborne Minster, and that a royal residence accompanied the

monastery within town walls into the 10th century. However, the present building dates from *c*.1120, with many changes over the centuries and, like many such edifices, substantial Victorian restoration.

In 1318 Edward II made the Minster a 'Royal Peculiar', answering directly to the monarch, not to the diocese (as with St George's Chapel, Windsor and Westminster Abbey); the choir wore scarlet robes until this status was revoked in 1846. In 1496 Lady Margaret Beaufort, granddaughter of John of Gaunt and mother of Henry VII, founded a small chantry in the minster, where her parents, John Beaufort and Margaret Beauchamp, are buried. The priest attached to it was required to be in permanent residence and 'to teach grammar to all comers'. In 1497, this was the seed of Wimborne's Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School, now Queen Elizabeth's Upper School.

The Minster contains a treasure trove of artefacts. Its Chained Library, established 1695, is one of only four in the country. Its collection includes early books on gardening, medicine, law, etiquette and building, Walton's great Polyglot Bible of 1657 (in nine languages) and five copies of the late 16th century Geneva (or so-called Breeches) Bible, wherein Adam and Eve 'sowed figge-tree leaves together and made themselves breeches'.

There are three monuments to time. The Astronomical Clock in the West Tower, from the early 14th century, depicts a stationary earth with the moon and sun revolving round it – a cosmology developed by the Greek astronomer Ptolemy and reflecting the scientific knowledge when it was built. The clock's movement, in the belfry, is attached to the Quarter Jack. This full-sized grenadier on the outside north wall strikes his bells every quarter-hour throughout the day and night. There is also a three-faced sundial, to show the time whenever the sun is shining (a single-sided, south-facing sundial could not show the time before 6am or after 6pm). Other curiosities inside the church include an Anglo-Saxon chest, the Man in the Wall, the Man with two left feet and the memorial brass dedicated to King Æthelred (it isn't known where he is buried, and he may have been moved to Sherborne).

Maiden Castle (GT)

Maiden Castle, south-west of Dorchester, is one of the largest and most complex Iron Age hillforts in Europe. Covering 19ha (47 acres), it's certainly the largest in Britain. Highly visible, I'd be surprised if anyone reading this hasn't seen it.

The site was described by Andrew in View from Above 13 (October 2018 newsletter), which showed the first of the two aerial photos by Sue Newman and Jo Crane included here. Clearance of the hilltop was around 3800 BC in the early Neolithic, with evidence of pits for flint extraction, a causewayed enclosure built and, subsequently, a bank barrow almost 550m long, though hard to trace now. There are two barrows within the hillfort, otherwise the site seems to have been used for agriculture through the Bronze Age into the Iron Age, until a fairly basic hillfort was constructed over the enclosure around 600 BC, one third the size that developed from about 150 years later when the hillfort was extended westwards. New ramparts and ditches were then added to produce the huge earthworks and complex entrances we can see today.

The numbers living on the hill seem to have declined from around 100 BC, becoming concentrated towards the eastern end, but, unlike many hillforts, some occupation continued until at least the Roman period. The later Iron Age cemetery excavated by the Wheelers in the 1930s gave rise to tales of Roman invasion, probably partly inspired by Mortimer Wheeler's military background. Most now think it was a cemetery used over some time, with little evidence of a full-scale Roman assault, but the story certainly raised Maiden Castle's profile (and Mortimer Wheeler's!). A great deal of what we now know came from Niall Sharples' excavations in 1985-6.

It isn't clear if there was a Roman military presence on the hill, but occupation was certainly limited during the Roman period. The 'Romano-British' temple and ancillary building pictured were constructed in the late 4th century – a pagan temple when the Empire was ostensibly Christian. There is said to be a circular temple a little to the south-west of this, but I can find no authoritative evidence of that. The hilltop was then used to graze livestock after the Romans 'left', with dewponds dug to provide water.

Evidence has been found by Sara Perry of York University that Maiden Castle featured in the first English-language (perhaps the first in the world) archaeology programme on TV in 1937, the first of a series. Unfortunately, neither scripts nor film survive, just correspondence records.

"Atmospheric", "jaw-dropping" and "great views" are just a few of the comments from visitors. It's hard to argue.

Weblink Highlights October 2023

At least 2 of the items in this month's list have been in the news before, in one case 3 years ago. However, as I cannot recall these discoveries, I have included them. The 3 year old item was first released to the media when the discovery was made (or soon after). The current media interest has been triggered by the publication of the relevant report, which was then picked up by the mainstream media and released again.

As somebody who spent many years in engineering, and hence using maths on a daily basis, the news that Pythagoras was not the first to set down the famous right angle triangle formula came as a surprise. But on reflection, with new discoveries changing long held beliefs on an almost daily basis, I really should not have been surprised. Whether it be that Britain was covered in dense forest after the last Ice Age, or dating the earliest humans into the Americas, or for that matter, out of Africa, our understanding has evolved as new discoveries reveal another version for us to run with … until another discovery changes the story again. The item about the Stonehenge altar stone rather makes this point!

Alan Dedden

October Weblinks - No. 61

New Treasures Found At Sunken City Off The Coast Of Egypt here

Study Reveals Route Taken By Early Humans Out Of Africa 84,000 Years Ago here

Pythagoras Theorem Found On Babylonian Tablet From 1,000 Years Earlier here

2,000 Year-Old Tomb Of Cerebus With Stunning Frescoes Found Near Naples here

Ancient 'Unknown' Script Finally Deciphered here

New Language Discovered In Ruins Of Capital Of Hittite Empire here

Rare Medieval Brooch Found By Metal Detectorist In Somerset To Go On Display here

Grim Discovery Reveals What Ancient Humans Did At Funerals here

American Tourist Arrested For Smashing Statues In Jerusalem Museum here

Fears Of 'Dangerous Precedent' Over Plans For Calanais Stones Access Charge here

White Sands Footprints Give New Earlier Date And Origin For First Americans here

Archaeologists Claim To Have Cracked Mystery Of Ancient Maya - 7,000 Year-Old Remains Found here

Coin Hoard Belonging To Highland Clan Chief Discovered During Archaeological Dig here

Evidence Of Oldest And Largest Solar Storm Found In Buried Forest In France here

New Analysis Shows Footwear Discovered In Spanish Cave In C19th Is 6,200 Years Old here

Blinking Fish Give Insight Into Life Evolving On Land here

Catapult Designed To Launch WWII Bombers Unearthed At Harwell here

4,000 Year-Old Engraved Rock Becomes 'Treasure Map' For Archaeologists here

Locals Asked To Return Coins Missing From Herefordshire Treasure Hoard here

Stonehenge's Altar Stone Is Not From Wales According To Latest Analysis here

Finding Shipwrecks And Planes Lost At Sea here

Discoveries In Turkey Point To New 'Social Order' After The Last Ice Age here

Has Noah's Ark Been Found? Archaeologists Reveal 'Ruins' In Boat Shaped Mound here

Hundreds Of Roman Forts Revealed In Declassified Cold-War Spy Satellite Images here

Hidden Rooms In Pyramid May Contain Pharaoh's Treasure here

AI Used To Read Ancient Scrolls Charred In Eruption Of Mount Vesuvius here

Lavish Tomb Indicates Egypt Had An Unusually Powerful Queen 5,000 Years Ago here.

'Forgotten' English Civil War Memorials Recorded On New Database here

Brazilian Drought Reveals Ancient Rock Carvings Of Human Faces here

Dinosaur Footprints Uncovered On Isle Of Wight Beach here

Skeletons Discovered In Rare 5,000 Year-Old Orkney Tomb here

Steel Making In Persia In The 11th And 12th Centuries here

For some old news, related to the article on castles below, have a look at:

Nearly 1,000 years ago, French lords designed an elaborate underground castle for a doomsday attack that never came

http://www.bbc.com/travel/story/20200827-a-secret-world-under-a-french-castle

The CBA Wessex November newsletter is here
We get a mention!

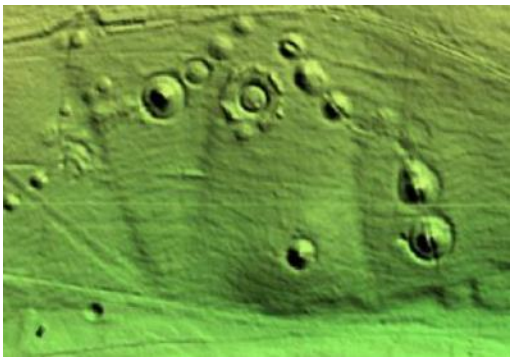
View from Above No. 57:
Snail Down and Sidbury Hillfort

Photos by Sue Newman and Jo Crane

Two for the price of one this time, as these two sites aren't far apart, just to the north-west of Tidworth Camp in Wiltshire. Both of these photographs were shown during Jo and Sue's EDAS talk in January 2018, though neither appeared in the following month's newsletter. Snail Down barrow cemetery is to the north of the hillfort, from which a large straight double ditch and bank runs northwards but bypasses the barrows a few hundred yards to their west, passing more barrows and a henge further along.

Both sites are in the Tidworth Dry Firing Ranges part of the vast Army training area of Salisbury Plain. This is mainly a tank training area and, I gather, there can be grandstand views of tank training, especially to the south of Sidbury Hillfort where the Ordnance survey shows the mass of criss-crossing tracks. As a 'dry' firing range, the whole area is open to the public except in exceptional circumstances, as there shouldn't be unexploded ordnance to be found. There are public rights of way across the ranges, but also many tank tracks where you obviously need to be on the lookout for fast moving vehicles.

The hillfort is described as sub-triangular and bivallate, enclosing about 7 hectares (17.5 acres) and with its main entrance on the north-west (top right). The double ditches above, with the bank between, extends from that entrance and is described by Historic England as a boundary marker, one of many in the area. Excavations in the 19th century and 1950s produced Iron Age pottery and artefacts, as well as flint flakes and tools from a Neolithic settlement in the area of the south-east ramparts.



The barrow cemetery pictured has a number of barrows of different sizes and forms, perhaps better appreciated from the LIDAR image, and there are more in the immediate vicinity. Excavations in this area have provided considerable evidence of secondary burials and settlement, with linear features and a field system suggesting an area of archaeological importance well beyond the visible barrows. What is very clear is the tank track across at least five barrows to the right, in contrast to the apparently undamaged, if overgrown, hillfort.

Despite such damage, and the results of artillery, etc., elsewhere, Salisbury Plain is "the most complete and extensive survival of chalk downland archaeological remains in central southern England … particularly in those areas lying within the Salisbury Plain Training Area." This is basically because the training areas haven't been developed, so there are large areas essentially untouched, giving evidence of the associations between sites as well as a high proportion of sites with excellent preservation.

Geoff Taylor/Jo Crane

From the Archives 13

Volume XV of the Dorset Proceedings is dated 1894, by which time the Dorset Natural History and Antiquarian Field Club had about 350 members listed, up from around 100 when they started in 1877. That includes 29 women – a slightly higher proportion than the 5% initially, but I haven't noticed any female authors amongst the antiquarians/archaeologists yet.

Volume XIV had been the longest yet at 300 pages, but the Club had some small financial issues, mainly from arrears of subscriptions, leading to this volume being rather shorter and with fewer illustrations. Their report puts membership at 291 rather than in the mid-300s, but I think that was at the start of their year as they had many new members during the 1893-4 season.

An article on Shaftesbury includes information about the royal "burghs" in Dorset in the Saxon period – Bridport, Shaftesbury and Wareham, but also Dorchester which was never one as far as I know. He says that in Edward the Confessor's time (1042-1066) Shaftesbury had 257 houses and Wareham 285; Dorchester was much smaller. By Domesday in 1086 there were apparently only 177 houses in Shaftesbury, 66 belonging to the king and the rest to the abbess.

One of the Club members reported on a list of King John's visits to Dorset; he called him "the most restless of kings". The data came from all the official sources remaining, including the Patent, Charter and Close Rolls, and the 'Wardrobe accounts'. The visits start in 1200, the year after John's coronation, and continue to August 1216, only 2 months before John's death (the effigy is from John's tomb in Worcester Cathedral). The majority of visits are, though, in the first half of this period.

In total 145 visits are recorded, where a visit is defined as a stay at (or near) a particular town for a day or more. This doesn't mean he came to Dorset that many times, as one journey through Dorset often involved staying in several different towns, and sometimes the same town more than once. On this basis, the most popular places were Gillingham (24), Corfe (23), Cranborne (19), Bere Regis (16), Dorchester (15) and Canford (12). It seems that John never stayed in Wimborne.

I don't usually cover the report on the club's 'Proceedings', or the annual Presidential Address, but thought I would look through them as there wasn't much else in this volume that I felt worth summarising. These are, in effect, the Club's reports for the AGM. The club was still holding meetings around the county, often involving field trips and generally reported in some detail. I found nothing that I thought of great interest and won't usually look at these items in future.

Volume XVI (1895) has two articles by "E. Cunnington", who I thought might be a relative of the famous antiquarian William Cunnington (1754-1810), who particularly worked in Wiltshire where he lived. The membership list showed "E" to be Edward, living in Weymouth, and William had a great grandson called Edward (1861-1950) who was also an archaeologist. However, he was generally known as Ben, or Benjamin, and lived and worked in Wiltshire like his great grandfather. 'Our' Edward was a contributor to Pitt Rivers' second collection of artefacts, and the list of contributors gives his possible dates as 1825-1916 and also suggests that he was William's son, which would certainly be remarkable.

Edward excavated Clandon Barrow, near Maiden Castle, in 1882 with finds passed to the County Museum. Some of them were lent to the British Museum for their Stonehenge exhibition in 2022, including the gold lozenge and shale mace head shown here. He was, however, more in the tradition of old-fashioned antiquarian than archaeologist, as we'll see in the next in this series.

Geoff Taylor

Early castles in Britain 1

It is suggested on Wikipedia that the oldest castle in the world is the Citadel of Aleppo in Syria from the 3rd millennium BC, though this was a fortified hilltop settlement rather than a castle as we would understand it. There is no shortage of similar places in, for example, the *acropoleis* of ancient Greece, and we might consider Iron Age hillforts as similar. In Germany, the Reichsburg Cochem castle is believed to have been built in the year 1000, and this was the period when 'proper' castle building really started.

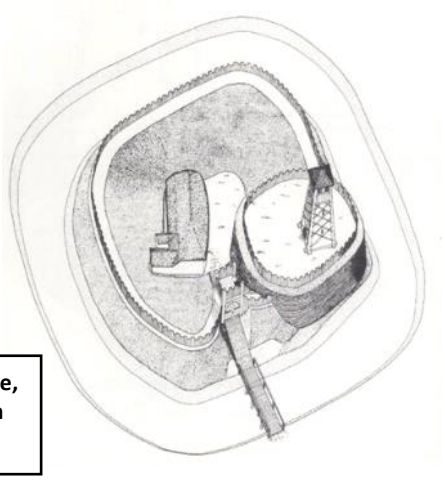
France's oldest castle is thought to be Montbazon on the Loire, built by Fulk, Count of Anjou, in the 990s. The Normans also had castles before William's Conquest, such as the Château d'Ivry-la-Bataille, with its stone keep (*donjon*) dating to around 1000 AD (as shown; it is suggested as the model for the White Tower in London, etc.). William's castle in Caen, built around 1060, also had a square keep, but with round towers at the corners.

In England, the Anglo-Saxons had the burhs, mainly in Wessex – fortified towns like Shaftesbury, Christchurch (Twynham) and Wareham – the best preserved one alongside Wallingford in Oxfordshire,

whose 'wall' is pictured here. Whilst burhs may have included a nobleman's residence, they were urban, communal fortifications that were also concerned with governmental and economic functions. King Alfred was the main instigator of the network of burhs, primarily military in purpose – to provide places of defence for people in the settlement and surrounding area and as bases for offensive action. The 10th century *Burghal Hidage* assessed Wareham's tax at 1600 hides, to pay for enough men to cover the 3 walled sides of the town at the Saxon standard of 4 men per 5½ yards (the puzzle being 'what about the 4th side'?).

Simplistically, the Normans introduced the castle to Britain, and it is almost always seen as military in function – in some sense a continuation of the burhs. Of course, in some cases castles were actually built in burhs, as in the above examples (though Shaftesbury's castle was probably adulterine, i.e. built without licence during the Civil War of 1135-1154, and the exact extent of the burh isn't clear). The castle in Wallingford was one of the earliest, a royal castle started after William crossed the Thames there on his way to take London, and 8 of William's royal castles were in burhs.

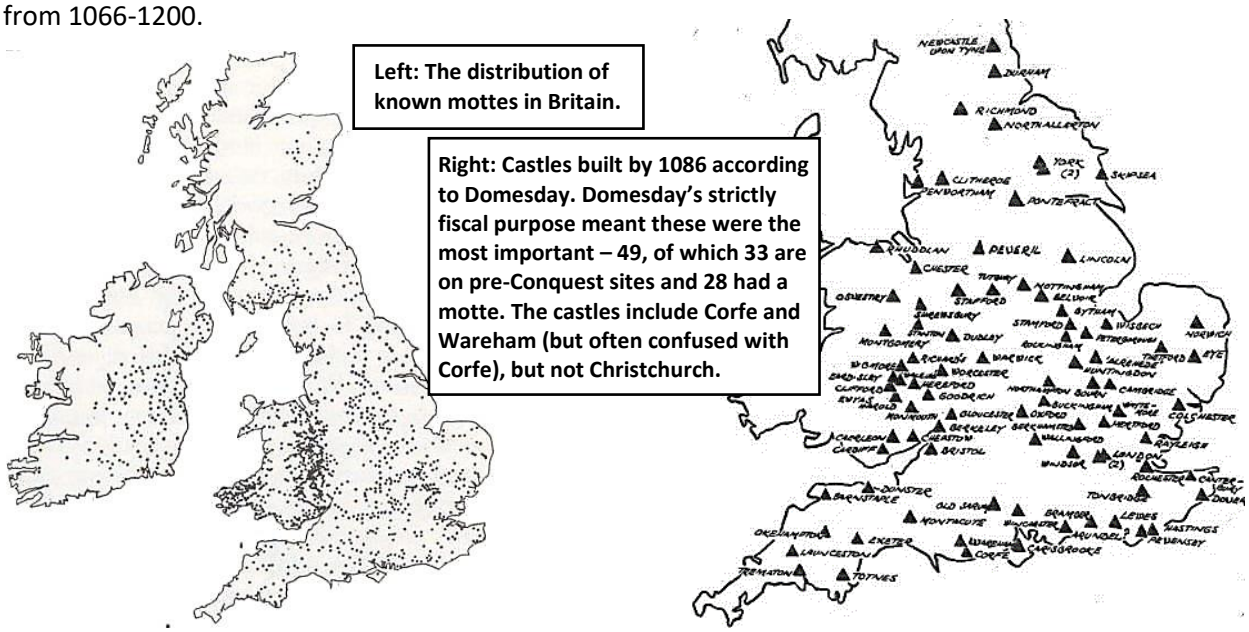
There are many continuities of site beyond the burhs, such as at Corfe where the early Norman hall seems to have replaced a Saxon one. Indeed, connections with previous high-status sites seems to have been important, with 12 of William's castles in Roman defences, as at Portchester. A great many castles took over and expanded upon Anglo-Saxon noblemen's fortified residences, as at Goltho in Lincolnshire. But that was the point of castles – they were the fortified, defensible residences of the ruling class and the centre of his estate; 'personal' rather than communal.



Reconstruction of the motte and bailey at Goltho, Lincolnshire, around 1125. The Normans initially enlarged the Anglo-Saxon ringwork, with the motte being built rather later.

Until relatively recently castle studies have been dominated by military theory, such as defences evolving to counter improved weapons, and the social, or 'personal', side has often been neglected. Yet even exponents of the 'military school' have been concerned by issues with the castles built. For example, many were in places where there was no obvious military justification, the strength of castles often far outweighed the likely military threat, whilst weaknesses in design not infrequently undermined (sometimes literally) a castle's military rationale.

The military view of Norman occupation really starts in 11th and 12th century accounts, such as the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle's diatribe on the 'evils of castle building'. Orderic Vitalis (1075-1142), a Benedictine monk and probably the most reliable of the Anglo-Norman chroniclers, attributed Saxon defeat to their lack of castles. This may be part of the story, but the lack of continued maintenance and manning of the burhs seems likely to have been more important. We should also be cautious about biased accounts, such as the Peterborough text of the Chronicle's statement that over 1,000 castles were raised in the 'Anarchy' of Stephen's reign, when only about 35 such adulterine castles are known. Of course Norman castles were built in large numbers – 36 by William I (24 in existing urban centres) and over 1,000 in total from 1066-1200.



Left: The distribution of known mottes in Britain.

Right: Castles built by 1086 according to Domesday. Domesday's strictly fiscal purpose meant these were the most important – 49, of which 33 are on pre-Conquest sites and 28 had a motte. The castles include Corfe and Wareham (but often confused with Corfe), but not Christchurch.

I'm sure we all know the simplified version of the overall approach – take over an existing site (in many cases, as above) and knock down anything that's in the way, throw up a motte if needed (probably with conscript labour), build in timber and replace in stone later. Of course, that hides many variations, but it isn't a bad overview.

We do know of many cases of urban foundations where houses were cleared to build a castle, such as in Lincoln (166 houses) and York (15% of the city). In Wallingford it seems that many of the buildings demolished had high status owners, and it is thought that many houses were cleared for Wareham castle, though the evidence is equivocal (partly because most early references to 'Warham' are actually about Corfe). This approach seems to me as much about impressing the natives and showing who is in charge as, necessarily, about finding the best place for a castle, and the first phase of castle building under William was certainly aimed at containing the demoralised and leaderless British.

For major urban castles the site was important and aimed to be on high ground, near a river and overlooking the most important towns like Lincoln, York (2 castles), Chester, Chepstow, Dover and, of course, London (also 2 castles). But how important was their siting generally, particularly for the ubiquitous motte and bailey castles on relatively rural sites, like Goltho above? As might be suggested by Goltho, was their purpose more than just defence? We'll look at this further in the next article.

Geoff Taylor

EDAS PROGRAMME 2023-24

Unless otherwise stated lectures are from 7:30 at
St Catherine's Church Hall, Lewens Lane, Wimborne, BH21 1LE.

Wed 8th November	Lecture	**Tom Cousins**	The Maritime Archaeology of Poole Bay
Wed 13th December	Lecture	**Gordon Le Pard**	Dorset Churches
2024			
Wed 10th January	***Zoom*** lecture	**David Reeve**	The oldest secular buildings in Wimborne
Wed 14th February	Lecture	**Miles Russell**	Frampton Villa excavations
Wed 13th March	**AGM** & Lecture	**Phil D'Eath & Geoff Taylor**	The 2023 Field Trip to Kent
Wed 10th April	Lecture	**Harry Manley**	The Dorchester Aqueduct
Wed 8th May	Lecture	**Andrew Morgan**	The Origins of Dorset – in search of the Dorset/Hampshire Shire Boundary

DISTRICT DIARY

Note: BNSS haven't had archaeology lectures available to non-members for some time and I don't always check their events. DNHAS lectures only appear here if I'm specifically notified, but their events (and others from various county organisations), which I hear of, are notified in the member mailings.

Wed 15th November	In search of the Anglo-Saxon shire boundary between Dorset and Hampshire - from Bokerley Dyke to the coast	**Wareham Society**	Andrew Morgan
Thurs 16th November	Adventures in Archaeology – highlights from 41 years of finding things beneath the ground	**AVAS**	Paul Cheetham
Thurs 16th November	Bringing the Past to Life	**Blandford Group**	Julian Richards
Wed 6th December	Stonehenge – What's New: A decade of science and speculation	**Wareham Society**	Tim Darvill
Thurs 14th December	What's new in the British and Irish Neolithic	**DNHAS**	Alison Sheridan
Thurs 18th January	A source of confusion: New Investigations on the Dorchester Roman Aqueduct	**AVAS**	Harry Manley
Thurs 15th February	Recent results from Avebury	**AVAS**	Josh Pollard
Thurs 21st March	The Coombe Bissett Landscape Research Project	**AVAS**	Alyson Tanner and Alix Smith

Archaeology Societies

- Avon Valley Archaeological Society: http://www.avas.org.uk/
  Meetings at Ibsley Village Hall, BH24 3NL (https://ibsleyhall.co.uk/), 7:30pm 3rd Thursday of month except June, July & August. Visitors £3.50; membership £10 pa.
- Blandford Museum Archaeology Group:
  https://blandfordtownmuseum.org.uk/groups-and-projects/archaeology-group/
  Meetings normally 7:30pm 3rd Thursday of each month September to May at Blandford Parish Centre, The Tabernacle, DT11 7DW. Visitors £3; membership £10 pa.
- Bournemouth Natural Sciences Society: http://bnss.org.uk
  Events at 39 Christchurch Road, Bournemouth BN1 3NS; lectures Tuesday 7:30pm/Saturday 2:30pm.
- The Christchurch Antiquarians: https://christchurchantiquarians.wordpress.com/
  No lecture programme but involved in practical archaeology projects. Membership £10 pa.
- Dorset Natural History & Archaeology Society: https://www.dorsetmuseum.org/whats-on/
  Events in Dorchester, usually ticketed and charged unless you're a DNHAS member.
- Wareham and District Archaeology & Local History Society: Their website isn't updated but they are on the Wareham Chimes site here, or contact Karen Brown at karen.brown68@btinternet.com.
  Meetings at Furzebrook Village Hall, BH20 5AR, normally 7:30pm 3rd Wednesday of each month except July & August. Visitors welcome for £3; membership £10 pa.