



East Dorset Antiquarian Society

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Founded 1983

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NEWSLETTER – January 2024

Wishing all our members a happy, healthy and peaceful 2024.

The first lecture of the new year, 7:30pm on the 10th, welcomes member David Reeve to talk about the oldest secular buildings in Wimborne. As David now lives in Somerset, this will be by Zoom on your own device (not, as a recent *Dorset View* article said, in the hall!). Your invitation will be emailed a few days before; all you need to do is click on the link in the email (you don't need Zoom downloaded to your device).

I'm away over the end of the month so the next newsletter will be later than usual. I aim to issue it before the meeting but, in case not: **February's meeting will start at 7:45; please don't arrive before 7:15 as people may still be leaving the car park.**

Thank you very much to Vanessa Joseph for writing the summary of last month's lecture by Gordon le Pard: **Interesting Dorset churches – insights from the Curious Archaeologist**. I'm also grateful to Vanessa for continuing to provide a couple of articles each month in the series about Dorset – see below.

A new survey of the Cerne Abbas Giant was announced to EDAS members in November and several volunteered to take part, though I understand that some may have been reserves who weren't then called upon. Thank you to those who kindly provided information and photographs, as credited in the article below: **Reinvestigating the Cerne Giant**.

But serendipity is alive and well: as I was putting this together (I'd just written the paragraph above), I took a break and spotted a 1st January article about the Giant on the BBC website. Almost immediately, Jim Stacey sent me a copy of the scholarly paper the BBC article was reporting about. So, thanks to Jim (and for another short item below), there's a piece further down on **Solving the Cerne Giant mystery?**

Four more articles about Dorset appear this month in the 'series' celebrating our 40th anniversary: **Black-burnished ware, around Poole Harbour; Ridgeway Hill, Weymouth; The devil's in the detail: Old Harry Rocks and Knowlton Circles and church**. Just one more month to go to complete the 40 items.

We do, of course, have Alan's **Weblinks** and **Highlights**, now amazingly on the 63rd edition, with my very grateful thanks. Thank you also to Sue Newman and Jo Crane for number 59 in the View from Above series: **Crichel Down bombing range**.

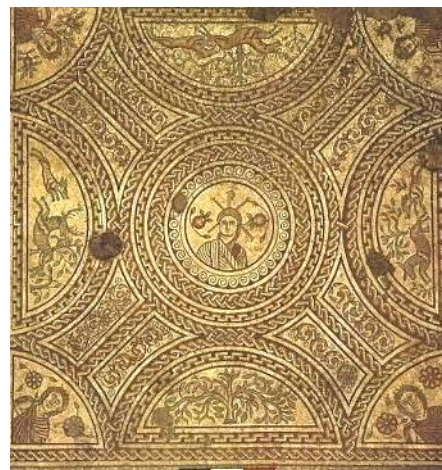
Early castles in Britain 3 continues the short series; obviously it's the third and there's just one more to go. The series looking at old Dorset Proceedings returns, now looking at items from close to the end of the 19th century: **From the Archives 14**. As usual, the newsletter concludes with the **EDAS Programme** and the **District Diary**, though relatively few 2024 lectures are advertised yet.

Geoff Taylor

Interesting Dorset churches – insights from the Curious Archaeologist: Lecture by Gordon le Pard

Gordon le Pard describes himself as a retired archaeologist who used to work for Dorset County Council, where he mapped the wrecks off the coast. He is a man with extremely wide interests, including a passion for Dorset churches. During a fascinating EDAS lecture, Gordon gave us a whistle stop tour of churches in more Dorset villages than most of us had ever known existed, all with their own special features, stories and historical significance.

Hinton St Mary and Frampton mosaics give evidence of early Christianity in Britain. Like other experts, Gordon queries the famous togate figure at Hinton St Mary as a representation of Christ. There was a strict rule that images of Christ should not be placed on the floor to be walked on. Perhaps the design here at Hinton St Mary came from a ceiling pattern?



Early saints and relics

Sherborne Abbey houses the remains of Æthelbald and Æthelbert, kings of the West Saxons, who were succeeded by their younger brother Alfred the Great. Gordon told us about Alfred's grandchildren, Edward and Æthelred, two sons born of different mothers. Edward was killed at Corfe Castle, probably by his stepmother Ælfthryth to enable her son Æthelred ('the Unready') to succeed to the crown. Stories tell that she offered him a drink whilst mounted on his horse and, as he accepted it, he was stabbed in the back.

Edward was buried at Wareham but the remains were eventually transferred to Shaftesbury Abbey, then hidden during the Dissolution. Excavated in the 1930s, the remains are consistent with those of a young man killed falling off his horse. Although St. Edward the Martyr is the patron saint of several Anglican churches in Dorset, his bones reside in the Orthodox Church of St Edward the Martyr in Brookwood, Surrey.



The Church of Saint Candida and Holy Cross at Whitchurch Canonorum is the only parish church in England to have a shrine with the ancient relics of a saint in a leaden casket, as pictured – a rare survivor of the Reformation. She is St Wite, the unofficial patron saint of Dorset, and the church has been a centre of pilgrimage for centuries. Did you know that Dorset Day on June 1 is the feast day of Saint Wite, and that the county flag is also known as St Wite's Cross?

A closer look at fonts

Gordon showed us the lovely old fonts at Stoke Abbot (left) and Batcombe, which would have been painted in bright colours before the Reformation. An unusual font can be found at Melbury Bubb with



motifs that make no sense until one realises it has been made from part of a column and then turned upside down. Lady St Mary in Wareham has the lead font here (right) – a rare survival of the Civil War as it might easily have been melted down for shot. Many reformed Presbyterian churches frowned on fonts and ordered them to be removed.

Fonts at Hinton St Mary and Winterborne Whitechurch have the remains of a locking system. This was to prevent holy water for baptisms, traditionally blessed at Easter, from being used for other arcane purposes such as curing sick cows! The font at Charlton Marshall can be raised and lowered mechanically, and features a golden angel's head as the counterbalance. Cattistock Baptistry has an extremely ornate font, part of the Victorian Gothic Revivalism decoration of the church by George Gilbert Scott junior, whose descendant invented the red telephone box.

Listening to sermons in comfort

There was no requirement for pews in the Middle Ages, though a few early examples from the 15th century onwards can be found in Yetminster, Gillingham, Trent and Charminster. The pews at St Laurence, Affpuddle, with late medieval carving are very rare and include the date 1547.

With the rising expectation for congregations to listen to long sermons, seating became more common and box pews were introduced in English Protestant churches. They came in various sizes, provided privacy, some comfort and allowed families to sit together. Pews were attached to property so had to be paid for – a sort of property tax. Pew rents provided a source of additional revenue in many churches from the early 17th century until the 20th century.

At Chalbury church, seats on either side of the box pews enabled people to look at the preacher and listen to the sermon rather than facing the altar. Gordon contrasted three richly carved pulpits in Affpuddle, Cerne Abbas and Abbotsbury with the much simpler affair (three tiers of desks) at Chalbury pictured.

Timing of sermons was important. An hourglass was installed on the pulpit at Bloxworth, whilst Cerne Abbas has a discreetly positioned watch stand inside the pulpit.



Rood screens and squints

No medieval rood screens survive in Britain. However, in Morcombelake the remains of the rood screen from a far older church have been incorporated into the new church. The most elaborate rood screen in Dorset can be found at Trent.



Hagioscopes, also known as leper's holes or squints, allowed the congregations in transepts or chapels to witness the elevation of the host, and were used to coordinate different masses in the same church.

Altars and altar tables

Stone altars were forbidden during the Reformation, though the very simple medieval altar pictured can be found at St Bartholomew's, Corton, which is situated in a farmyard. This 13th century Purbeck Marble altar may have survived because it was treated as a useful shelf in a barn.

A fragment of the old altar at Godmanstone was reused as a grave marker until it found its permanent home below the Victorian communion table in the church.

Some lovely examples of wooden altar tables can be found in Cerne, Morcombelake and Little Bredy.



Memorials and dates

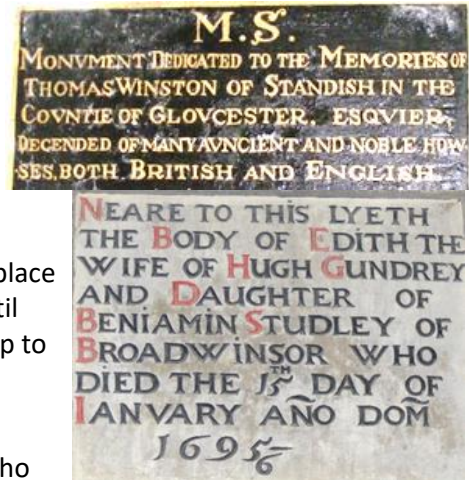
Elaborate Purbeck marble monuments include those to Sir Hugh Wyndham (Silton), Thomas Strode (Beaminster), and to John Digby, 3rd Earl of Bristol, and his two wives in Sherborne Abbey. But memorial stones can also merit a closer look. Next to a pair of magnificent tombs in Longburton, a memorial stone dated 1609 mentions that Thomas Winston of Standish was of dual nationality, 'both British and English'. James I was the first Stuart king of England (1603-1625) who styled himself 'king of Great Britain', but it was The Acts of Union in 1707 that actually led to the creation of a kingdom called 'Great Britain'.

James VI proclaimed that Scotland should start the year on 1 January from 1600. Following the Union of the Crowns in 1603, when he became James I of England, no such legal change took place south of the Border, where the new year began on 25 March until 1752. As a result, the same day in January, February or March (up to the 24th) could be in different years. This memorial stone at Broadwindsor perfectly reveals this confusion.

Of course, there is then Anthony Ettrick, 'the man in the wall', who



has a curious burial place inside Wimborne Minster. A local magistrate, he obtained permission to make a recess in the wall, where his colourful coffin was placed in his lifetime. Convinced he would die in 1693, Ettrick had the date painted on the side, but he did not die until 1703... and the date was altered!



There is an unusual pyramidal monument in Spetisbury to Thomas Rackett. Part of the inscription reads "...talents were not confined to the exercise of ordinary Parochial duties, they extended themselves to the Promotion and Cultivation of the various useful Arts which soften the asperity of human nature." In other words, he was an absentee vicar who visited his parish once a year.

Phew! Was there anything else we ought to be looking at? As an encore, Gordon talked about musician's galleries – look out for them in Winterborne Tomson, Winterbourne Steepleton and Winterbourne Abbas. The tipsy musicians of Thomas Hardy novels were replaced by barrel organs known as 'dumb organists'. Lillington church has one of the finest Victorian instruments in the country.

At the Restoration of the Monarchy in 1660, the Royal Arms had to be displayed in churches. The oldest coat of arms, at Wyke Regis, features the English lion and the Welsh dragon and is carved from stone. The one at Broadwindsor includes the date 1783.

Author's note: As a lover of Shakespeare, I was very impressed by the historic allusion which is to be found in the church at Whitcombe. During the late 15th century, Dorset was a Yorkist county. The windows include both the white rose emblem and the sun. The latter refers to the King of England – Edward IV, Glorious Son of York. This allusion was immortalised in the opening lines of the play *Richard III*: "Now is the winter of our discontent. made glorious summer by this son of York".

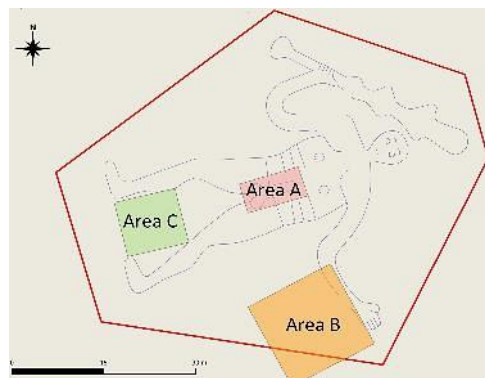


Vanessa Joseph

Reinvestigating the Cerne Giant

Martin Papworth excavated parts of the Cerne Abbas Giant in 2020, with results planned to be announced on the centenary of National Trust ownership, but lockdown was, instead, announced on the last day of working. The excavations were very successful, dating the Giant to around the 10th century, but results have yet to be fully published. The history of the figure, and a summary of the results from the excavation, are covered in an article in the Midsummer 2021 Newsletter; there's also a short piece in the last newsletter.

This new survey primarily aimed to see if there had been a belt, as in some old drawings, which might mean that the genitalia weren't original. Earlier work showed that the phallus had been extended to incorporate a navel, which would also be checked. Could they also find anything about the symbols between the legs only ever recorded by Hutchins in 1774, as well as clarify if anything hung from the outstretched arm, variously thought to be a cloak, lion skin or a severed head. The survey areas are obvious on the plan (the red line marks the scheduled area, and the scale is 30m).



Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) was to be used for the first time, and it was also planned to do resistivity and resistivity tomography. GPS data would place results accurately on the figure.

The survey was led by Paul Cheetham, ably assisted by Dave Stewart and Mike Allen (a summary of his EDAS lecture is in the newsletter above), with volunteers beyond just the EDAS members, who learnt a lot from the helpful experts there. It was intended to take 5 days from Monday 4th December but that day was rained off, as was the Thursday, so Monday 11th was added for some final checks. Sadly, Dave managed to hurt his back quite badly on the Friday carrying a heavy battery up the steep slope; we hope he will have fully recovered by the time you read this. The steep and uneven slope, wet grassy ground and sheep poo certainly made for difficult working; as one volunteer said, it's "not for the faint hearted". GPR work was tricky, requiring steady movement and close contact with the ground. Nevertheless, most of the planned survey work was successfully completed.



Preliminary results confirm the navel but not the presence of a belt, showed no symbols between the legs, and imply there was probably a cloak and severed head in some form. These are preliminary results and may be overturned by the detailed analyses yet to be done. The full results of this investigation will be included in a new book intended to be published in August, centred on Martin Papworth's excavations but with a great deal of other relevant information:

Michael J Allen (ed.), *A Date with the two Cerne Giants: Reinvestigating an iconic British Hill Figure* (available from Oxbow books; further details [here](#)).

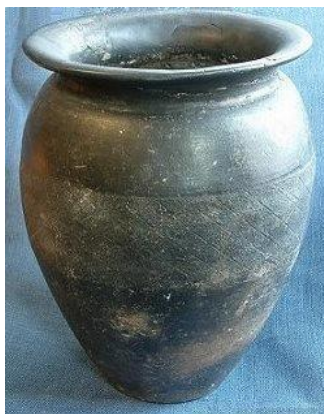
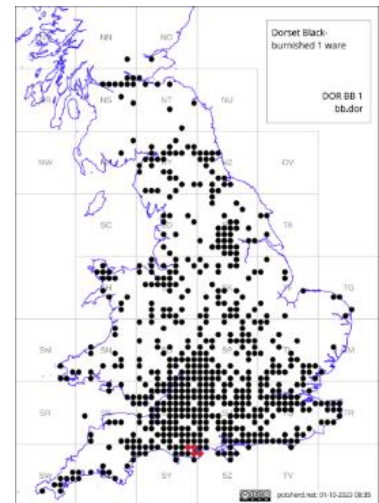


Anne Brown, Dave Stewart, Janet Bartlet, Steve Griffin

Black-burnished ware, around Poole Harbour (GT)

Here “BBW” in short, though I should really call this South-East Dorset Black-burnished 1 ware as there are other types of BBW. Like our local pottery, South-West Black-burnished 1 ware was handmade, but in the west of Dorset, east Devon or Somerset, while the Rossington Bridge pots came from near Doncaster in Yorkshire. Black-burnished 2 wares were wheel-thrown and produced along the Thames estuary in both Essex and Kent.

BBW was first produced by the Durotriges around Poole Harbour in the Late Iron Age, with distribution mainly within the ‘tribal’ area. Production continued into and through the Roman period, with distribution expanding massively from the 2nd century and reaching much of Roman Britain, as shown, and to the Antonine Wall. BBW was clearly favoured by the Roman military, with considerable amounts found along Hadrian’s Wall. It is suggested that BBW captured the bulk of the military market from c.120AD. The other ‘versions’ basically developed in the Roman period, presumably attempting to emulate Dorset ceramics; they all have much more limited distribution, although all have been found on both Roman walls.



Pottery forms derived from BBW types, like the everted rimmed jar pictured, became the dominant forms in many Romano-British coarse ware industries during the later 3rd-4th centuries. However, many of the studies suggest that BBW’s popularity was particularly about the pottery’s ability to withstand thermal shock. In other words, BBW was heat-resistant when used in cooking or as table ware. BBW types were also used for storage, and it is thought that BBW vessels may have been used to transport other products, particularly salt from the many known saltworks around Poole Harbour as well as preserved meat and seafood. Presumably this would also have helped to spread transport costs and make the pots more affordable.

Over the years several kiln sites have been found, like Corfe Mullen (away from the harbour of course), Worgret and Ower, as well as many likely production areas around the harbour where the kilns haven’t been found. But the excavations led by Lilian Ladle from 1992-2005 at Bestwall Quarry, just east of Wareham, found remains of 30 kilns, with one shown here. The excavations showed what a huge industry BBW had become from around 180 AD, with the last pots being manufactured in the early 5th century. The artist’s



impression, by Jane Brayne and commissioned by Aggregate Industries for the project, gives an idea of just a part of this huge site. BBW even reached continental Europe, particularly western coastal areas, from the later 3rd century onwards.

This hand-made pottery, originating with the Durotriges in the Iron Age, was clearly an early success story for Dorset commerce. As one of the academic references consulted said, “Poole Harbour and the Isle of Purbeck appear to be the scene of one of the most remarkable, varied and substantial concentrations of later Iron Age and Romano-British export industries to be found anywhere in Britain.”

Ridgeway Hill, Weymouth (GT)

A burial pit was discovered in 2009 near the projected A354 Weymouth Relief Road, about a kilometre north of Upwey. The pit was in a disused Roman quarry, close to both the line of the Dorchester-Radipole Roman road and to a Bronze Age barrow. It was excavated by Oxford Archaeology as part of the major investigations in advance of the new road and, since the area was outside the main construction zone, detailed work could be done over several months.



The pit contained the haphazardly buried remains of 54 skeletons, but with just 51 skulls set at one side. Most were young men from their late teens to mid-20s, although a few were older men, up to their 50s. Evidence suggested that some had been subject to violence before being killed, perhaps as part of their capture, and that those who killed them were not practised executioners, with many receiving several blows before dying.

Radiocarbon dating placed burial from around AD 970-1025.



Although no remains of clothing or other possessions were found to help identify these people, analysis of teeth and bones showed that they came from Scandinavia and had eaten a high protein diet, with evidence of food from several locations in northern Europe. Physical features were similar to contemporary Scandinavian populations and the physique of many suggested they could have been warriors, though a few had physical issues suggesting they were not. Also, there were no obvious healed wounds of the types known from battles; if they were warriors it seems they were fairly inexperienced.

Several theories have been suggested, but perhaps the most likely is that this was the crew of a Viking longship captured by local Anglo-Saxons, possibly during an attempted raid. This was certainly a time of conflict with the Vikings, with Danish raids becoming more serious from the 980s after a period of relative peace when many Danes had settled in Wessex. The 'ravaging of Portland' happened in 982, and Viking attacks on Dorset are known in 998 and 1015 or 1016. There may be a link to the St Brice's Day massacre of 13th November 1022, when Æthelred 'the Unready' ordered the deaths of all Danes (thought to mean all Scandinavians) living in England.

Full details are in the 2014 Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society Monograph No. 22: *'Given to the Ground': A Viking Age Mass Grave on Ridgeway Hill, Weymouth*. It reveals the story of the discovery of what is arguably the most dramatic physical evidence for violence in early medieval Britain.

Knowlton Circles and church (VJ)

Despite reduction by ploughing and encroachment of recent farming activities, the Knowlton Circles complex is one of the most significant groups of henge monuments representing Late Neolithic ceremonial landscapes in England. Situated in the upper Allen valley, within Cranborne Chase, it is one of the few instances where many forms of the henge tradition occur in close proximity. It seems to have formed the collective focus for ceremonial and funerary activity dating from the middle of the 3rd millennium BC, probably lasting for a thousand years.

Locals and visitors know Knowlton for its ruined Norman church, situated in the centre of the well-preserved late Neolithic henge, known as the 'Central Circle' or 'Church Henge'. The church, built of flint

with some sandstone, post-dates the earthwork by about 3,800 years. The unusual pairing of henge and church, with associated yew trees, reflects the importance of the prehistoric landscape as a direct challenge to Christianity and the change from pagan to Christian worship.

Knowlton Rings was used as a meeting place for the local Saxon Hundred when Knowlton was a thriving village, before bubonic plague struck in 1485.

The Knowlton Prehistoric Landscape Project, led by John Gale of Bournemouth University, ran intermittently between 1993 and 2009. BU reported on a ceremonial and funerary landscape comprising a group of henge monuments, an associated group of over 60 round barrows and a Saxon ceremony, as well as the Norman church.



Photo: Sue Newman & Jo Crane

‘Church Henge’ is one of four broadly contemporary earthworks that appear to form a ‘precinct’ of ceremonial monuments dominating the landscape. The complex developed into an extensive funerary landscape, which probably lasted for a thousand years, with the remains of over 170 burial mounds located within a radius of 1km of Church Henge.

In 1994, a small excavation was conducted on the badly eroded Southern Henge. A trench 3m x 30m was excavated across the remaining bank and internal ditch, revealing a surviving ancient land surface under the henge bank and a large quarry ditch nearly 5m deep.

From 2002–2008, excavation and field surveys concentrated on a badly eroded Bronze Age barrow cemetery three miles to the south of Knowlton at High Lea Farm. Here, excavations revealed a complex series of deposits under one of the better-preserved barrows that began with the construction of a Beaker-period house, followed by the construction of an Early Bronze Age mortuary structure, a Bronze Age barrow and, finally, the same barrow became the focus for the establishment of an Anglo-Saxon cemetery that contained at least 90–100 burials.



The better-preserved barrow at High Lea Farm under excavation in 2008

The devil’s in the detail: Old Harry Rocks (VJ)

Old Harry Rocks, at the end of Studland Bay, is a famous landmark and part of the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site. The stunning geological formation is composed of three chalk stacks situated off the southern tip of Handfast Point. The stacks, which were once joined to the mainland, are remnants of coastal erosion caused by the sea.

Old Harry refers to the single stack of chalk standing furthest out to sea. Until 1896, there was another stack known as Old Harry’s Wife but erosion caused her to tumble into the sea, leaving just a stump. (Note, this is Old Harry’s second wife; his original wife fell in 1509.) Both rocks stand seawards of a much larger ‘island’ of rock which has, in fact, split into two separate parts, and is known as No Man’s Land.





The series of pure white stacks was initially a part of the chalk ridge line that runs across the south coast. Until about 10,000 years ago, the ridge joined the Isle of Wight with the Isle of Purbeck. It was formed approximately 66 million years ago when the area was under a shallow sea, from the gradual accumulation of minute calcite plates (coccoliths) shed from trillions of micro-organisms called coccolithophores. Flint nodules embedded in chalk are thought to be the silicon remains of sponge beds. The appearance of the chalk from the promontory at Old Harry is quite regular, with

the bedding planes and joints almost looking like laid breeze blocks.

Old Harry Rocks and the Needles emerged over millennia as the sea whittled the ridge away and, on a clear day, you can see the Needles across the sea when you stand on top of Handfast Point.

According to local folklore, the name "Old Harry" originated from a local pirate, Harry Paye, who used the stacks as a lookout point and placed his ship behind the rocks to intercept passing merchant vessels sailing in and out of Poole Harbour. He hid his contraband in tidal sea caves which riddle the largest of Old Harry Rocks, The Foreland.

However, Old Harry is also an historic nickname for the devil. The top of the cliff nearby is known as Old Nick's Ground and, legend says, the devil once slept on these rocks overnight. Yet another tale has it that a ninth-century Viking raid was thwarted by a storm and that one of the drowned, Earl Harold, was turned into a pillar of chalk.

A note from a sailing friend of Jim Stacey on the summary of our lecture on 'The Maritime Archaeology of Poole Bay' and the Iron Age Green Island Causeway (more likely two piers):

"The causeway from Cleavel Pt to Green Island is always in my mind when doing one of our Beehive round-the-islands races. You can play safe & stick to the channel or cut across near the Island taking the risk of catching your dagger-board & rudder on it. It is a tricky decision."

The CBA Wessex January newsletter is [here](#), with information about several lectures including our own.



Weblink Highlights December 2024

It is good to see some local news with the item about the sword found in the River Stour near Sturminster Newton. The other items this month represent a very varied selection of topics, although there appears to be a theme of 'the world's oldest'. Also interesting, but perhaps not surprising, that there are two items about nativity scenes.

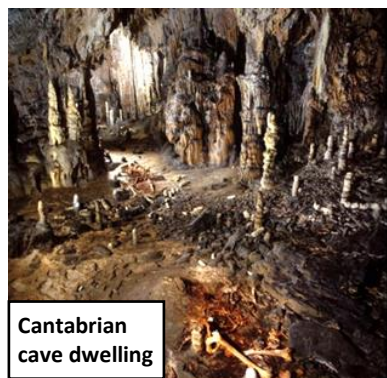
The item on the world's oldest city is part of an on-going programme to investigate the previously kept secret cold war photographs, and discoveries from this programme have been featured in weblinks in the past.



World's largest castle

Alan Dedden

December Weblinks - No. 63



Coin from Colkirk hoard



- Prehistoric 'Time Capsule' Found In Cave Dwelling In Cantabria [here](#)
- Signs Of Earliest Life On Earth Found In 3.5 Billion-Year-Old Discovery [here](#)
- Tragic Death Of 'Perfectly Preserved' 13,000 Year-Old Girl [here](#)
- Chiseled Obsidian Recovered From Neolithic Shipwreck Near Capri's 'Blue Grotto' [here](#)
- 'A Bunch Of Amateurs' Discover Lost Palace Linked To Henry VIII [here](#)
- Rare Byzantine Gold Coin Found At Innlandet County, Norway [here](#)
- Spain Logs Hundreds Of Shipwrecks That Tell Story Of Maritime History [here](#)
- Divers Map 2 Mile Trail Of Scattered Relics And Treasure From Legendary Shipwreck 'Maravillas' [here](#)
- Roman Coin Hoard From Colkirk, Norfolk, Goes For £15,000 At Auction [here](#)
- Attenborough BBC Film Tells Of Risky Mission To Recover 'T Rex Of The Seas' From Dorset Cliff [here](#)
- Discoveries At Site Of Roman Town Challenge Assumptions About Empire's Decline [here](#)
- Metal Detectorists Unearth £500,000 Hoard Of Anglo-Saxon Coins Minted In 1066 [here](#)
- 'Shocking Example Of Roman Slavery' Unearthed At Pompeii [here](#)
- 3,500 Year-Old Axes Potentially Used For 'Cult Practice' Discovered In Polish Forest [here](#)
- Luxurious Ancient Roman Home With Extraordinary Mosaic Unveiled Near Colosseum [here](#)
- Decline Of Rare UK Bat Linked To Tree Felling For British Empire Fleet [here](#)
- Neanderthal DNA May Explain Why Some Of Us Are Morning People [here](#)
- DNA Sleuths Solve Mystery Of 2,000 Year Old Corpse [here](#)
- Inside The World's Largest Castle That Took 132 Years To Build [here](#)
- World's Oldest Preserved Globe Reveals Dark Side Of Human Exploration [here](#)
- World's Oldest Forts Challenge Idea That Farming Alone Led To Complex Societies [here](#)
- National Trust Archaeologists Find Medieval 'Gift Token' In Norfolk [here](#)
- Oldest Known Ship Burial Discovered In Norway Predates The Vikings [here](#)
- 72 Million Year Old 'Blue Dragon' Found In Japan Is Unlike Anything Seen Before [here](#)
- Lost Colony Discovered Off Coast Of Australia [here](#)
- World's Oldest City Found In Forgotten Cold War Spy Plane Photographs [here](#)
- Cave Painting Found In Egyptian Sahara Depicts A Nativity Scene From 3,000BC [here](#)
- Cave Art Of Handprints With Missing Digits May Result From Ritual Removal [here](#)
- Nativity Style Statuettes Found At Pompeii Suggest Pagan Ritual [here](#)
- Woolly Mammoth Bone Confirms Scotland Was Home To The Elephant Ancestor [here](#)
- Perfectly Preserved Dinosaur Embryo Found Inside Fossilized Egg [here](#)
- Ancient Star Map, Or An Example Of 'The Selection Effect'? [here](#)
- Ancient Sword Found In River Stour [here](#)

Solving the Cerne Giant mystery?

Until Martin Papworth's work in 2020, much of what was said about the Giant at Cerne Abbas was speculation based on earlier/antiquarian views. Since then, a greater focus on the huge figure has come much closer to revealing its past, partly covered in the newsletter article above and the earlier ones mentioned there. On the first day of this new year, a scholarly article has given us much more information, reported on the BBC website [here](#) as "solving the mystery?".



Trench through the left foot in 2020.

The article, by Thomas Morcom and Helen Gittos*, appears in *Speculum*, published by The University of Chicago Press, who claim it is "the most widely distributed journal of medieval studies". The authors don't claim to have 'solved' the mystery, rather to have "set the Giant in its Early Medieval context". I see that the authors aren't included in the forthcoming edited volume above, *A Date with the two Cerne Giants...*; maybe now they'll have to be.

In summary, the 60m high figure is said to have been carved originally as an image of Hercules to mark a muster station for West Saxon armies. It was then re-interpreted by the monks of Cerne Abbey in the 11th century as their patron saint, Eadwold; a pagan figure looming over your abbey was inconvenient.



The authors make several arguments which strengthen Martin Papworth's then surprising dating of the Giant to the early Middle Ages. For example, the teardrop-shaped face was well known in Anglo-Saxon art (e.g. the 7th century figurine from Carlton Colville in the British Museum shown here). The identification of the Giant with the classical god Hercules has been suggested since at least the 18th century, and the authors believe that is who he represented. Their main clue is the arm with the club in the right hand partly held over the head, echoed in earlier monuments, but the figure also fits with one of the hero's failings – lust. Hercules' outstretched arm would often be draped with a lionskin mantle, often thought to have been there originally. The latest survey results, once finalised, will cast light on this reasoning, of course.

It might be thought that a monument to Hercules fits better in the Classical period, but he was apparently well-known throughout the Middle Ages and features in many texts, particularly in the 9th century. Intriguingly, one is thought to be by St Aldhelm (or his pupil), who became Bishop of nearby Sherborne (see also the May 2023 newsletter).

Further reasoning based on royal and aristocratic ownership in and around Cerne, and on landscape features such as routeways and possible medieval marker stones, are hard to summarise and seem to me less solid. However, a late 10th century charter does record a *herepath* passing just under the Giant and up the hill, thought to be a route for assembling Saxon armies, and the figure would make a good visible muster point meeting many of the known requirements for such a place.



It was thought that the earliest reference to the Giant was in 1694, but the authors believe a mid-12th century manuscript of lessons about St Eadwold came from a mid-11th century life of the saint written by Goscelin of St Bertin, who settled in Sherborne for a time. A passage relates to Eadwold on a sloping cliff with signs from God below, including a staff of wood bursting back into life and a silver fountain next to a place of worship. The Giant's club's pointed protrusions match images of Christ's cross springing to life, whilst the fountain could be Augustine's Well next to the abbey (May 2023 newsletter). This could be deliberately likening the Giant to the saint, whose relics provided a large income for the abbey.

There is more, including the supposed link to the pagan god Helith, but I've run out of space and time.

* I assume Helen Gittos is related to (daughter of?) Moira and Brian Gittos who reported on the cross slab from Wimborne All Hallows. They, and many people from Cerne Abbas, are mentioned in the paper.

Geoff Taylor

View from Above 59: Crichel Down bombing range

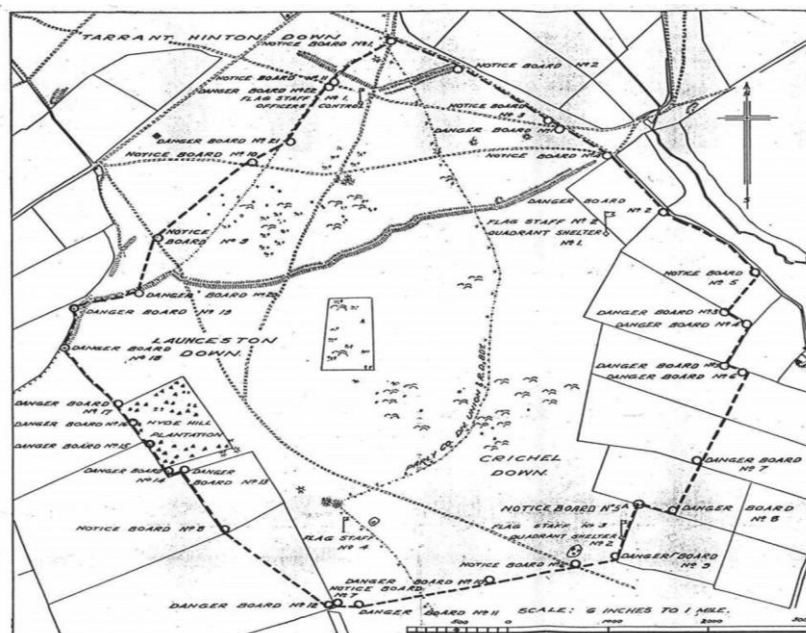


Photo by Sue Newman and Jo Crane

This photograph, and the map below, were shown by Jo and Sue in their talk to EDAS in January 2018, along with images about the Ashley range in the New Forest (see September 2022 newsletter). The marks are mainly from the WWII Crichel Down bombing range, about 7 miles north-west of Wimborne, but are nowhere near as comprehensive or obvious as those in the New Forest. As far as I can tell, there is nothing to be seen on the ground.

I imagine that this is partly down to the Ashley range being used to test different/new bombs against various types of construction, and partly due to the Crichel Down range's subsequent agricultural use. Similarly, and unlike the New Forest range, there is very little to be found online. Oddly (to me at least) the bye-laws applicable to the range, including the map, are online: "The Crichel Down Bombing Range, to which these Bye-laws apply, is situated partly on Launceston Down and partly on Crichel Down, in the parishes of Tarrant Hinton, Tarrant Launceston and Long Crichel in the County of Dorset and consists of an area of Air Ministry land ...".

Also online are many references to the "The Crichel Down affair". This was a political scandal in 1954, centring on 725 acres of land near Long Crichel that were compulsorily purchased by the Air Ministry in 1938 for bombing practice. In 1941 Winston Churchill promised, in Parliament, that it would be returned after the war. Instead, it was handed to the Ministry of Agriculture and leased for farming. In 1949, the heirs to the Crichel estate began a campaign to regain the land, and eventually gained a public



enquiry which produced a damning report about the government's actions. The minister responsible, Sir Thomas Dugdale, resigned and the land was sold back. The resulting Crichel Down Rules require government departments, under certain circumstances, to offer back surplus land to the former owner or successors at the current market value.

Early castles in Britain 3

In the earlier articles we have seen that, though attention was given to the siting of major castles, it is difficult to see the military rationale for many castles, particularly given the issues with design and construction. Whilst the keep was the castle's central strongpoint, it also came with problems.

Keeps (and, indeed, castles generally) usually had just one entrance as a matter of security, but that created a bottleneck. Moreover, the entrance, as the weakest point, needed extra defences. As seen here at Rochester, the entrance was generally above ground level and with a forebuilding. This created even more corners and worsened the bottleneck – everything had to come in and out through one relatively small, difficult to reach, opening. Creating some elements of comfort was probably vital if life inside wasn't to become intolerable.



The keep was an innovation in bringing together the various structures needed into a simple and highly defensive single building, but it clearly had flaws. If it was impregnable it was also a trap for the inhabitants, who could be kept inside by a fairly small force. The size of force that most keeps could accommodate was hardly a threat to an army, only to the local peasants, who really didn't need a stone building to be kept at bay – earthworks and palisades would usually have been quite sufficient. More than a keep was needed, even if just to give living space, hence the further defences built around them. Again, though, they mostly didn't need to be particularly strong against the threat of rebellious locals.

It has to be wondered if some castles were needed at all. It has been suggested that Corfe was for coastal defence, yet it isn't close to the coast nor blocking routes to significant ports (or, indeed, to anywhere significant). According to the Royal Commission, it was "one of the strongest [castles] in all England", yet it doesn't seem to defend anything. Wareham was actually more important because of its port, which provided a key link to Normandy and the continent (at least until the Frome began to silt up in the 13th century and/or ships got too large). It had, in fact, been the landing point for Canute's invasion of Wessex in 1015. Perhaps the best (or should that be worst?) example is Richmond, which completely dominates the entrance to Swaledale, an area of no economic or strategic significance whatsoever.

Castles weren't even particularly useful in protecting surrounding areas, with the string of castles on the Scottish Border usually failing to prevent large incursions. In fact they weren't necessarily all that useful under attack either, particularly as maintaining a significant garrison (not to mention the fabric) was too expensive for many owners. For example, Christchurch changed hands twice in the 1140s, although Stephen's attack on Corfe in 1139 using the adulterine castle now called 'The Rings' was unsuccessful. Sieges of strong castles were, though, fairly rare, mainly because they were expensive. As a rather later

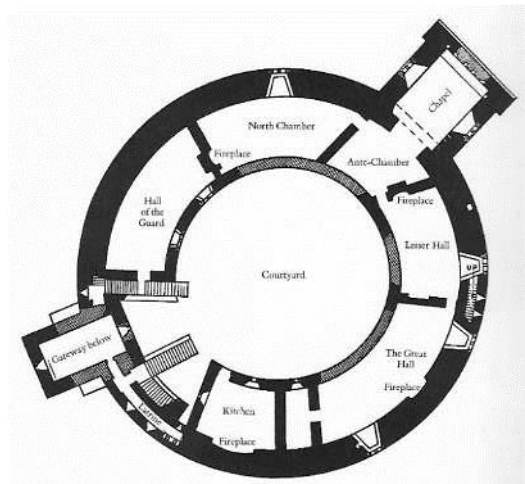


example, Henry III's 2-3 week siege of Bytham Castle in Lincolnshire in 1224 was recorded as costing £500, more than the gross annual income of all but perhaps 20 of the wealthiest nobles. Bytham's motte and bailey castle had significant earthworks (shown), partly protected by water, but defensive constructions were mostly (perhaps

wholly) timber. The cost of King John's successful 3 month siege of the much stronger stone castle at

Rochester in 1215 must have been enormous, and was only continued because of John's obstinacy. That expensive, large and dominant castles were built seems, as suggested previously, to have often been a matter of prestige, ego and demonstrating authority. In fact, the ability to add defensive features to a noble's building was a privilege of rank, and hence a mark of it. The general populace were not a significant threat, and the stone tower keep was a rather expensive means of awing the local people, though it was sure to do that – these, and the new cathedrals, would be the largest buildings that they had ever seen. However, the other barons and magnates were a potential threat or, at least, rivals. Initially, of course, they were a central part of William's approach to pacifying the country, but jostling between them for power and authority must have started almost immediately. Castles would have been just part of demonstrating their authority and making them secure in their estates; the impression they gave to those who saw them wasn't just directed at the populace. These were, of course, issues that came to a head in the Civil War between Matilda and Stephen, and in the later barons' struggles against royal power.

And yet castles continued to be built, improved and extended, apparently ignoring many of the issues with their military capabilities. I have glossed over developments in castle design but there was, of course, a technological battle between the means of offence and the defences required to counter them. For example, the circular or polygonal shell keep removed some of the problems with square keeps, but by no means all. Arundel's, from about 1138, is well known on its huge motte, though the best example is probably the later Restormel, in Cornwall, whose plan is shown.



Yet square tower keeps continued to be built until at least the end of the 12th century, which either suggests their main purpose wasn't military or that the emphasis had shifted to the curtain wall and projecting towers that allowed for flanking fire along the walls. Outer circuits provided more defences, and more space, but they also emphasised status and separation from the hoi polloi.

It is odd, then, that a castle sited in a specific place with a clear aim should apparently ignore some of the developments in castle design. Orford Castle in Suffolk was begun in 1165 under Henry II to counter the power of Earl Bigod in East Anglia. It did have a curtain wall, which appears to have had projecting square towers, though whether these had arrow loops to allow flanking fire isn't clear. However, it also had a tall and expensive keep taking up a good part of the bailey. With a strong curtain wall, a keep doesn't seem to be a major necessity, but if it was felt to be needed then a strong defensive design seems to be indicated. However, Orford keep has an unusual and unique design – circular but with 3 square projections. There are no openings to allow flanking fire and the main windows were clearly designed to provide light. In the past this was suggested as a transition towards the round keep, but that hardly seems likely – Orford's keep, in fact, has even more defensive issues than the square tower keep, with much more dead ground, more corners and relatively weak walls.



More recent suggestions relate to its symbolism, in particular that it was designed to resemble the Theodosian walls of Constantinople. I'll consider the symbolism and, indeed, ideologies embodied in the approach to designing and building the early castles in the next, concluding, article.

Geoff Taylor

From the Archives 14

Continuing with Edward Cunnington in Volume XVI of the Proceedings, his first article was concerned with Poundbury, near Dorchester. Sadly, he was prone to leap to conclusions, make statements based on little or no evidence, and ignore previous studies that didn't agree with his views. For example:

- Before the Romans arrived there was, he says, a lake from the edge of Dorchester northwards for about 3 miles, up to a mile wide. No evidence of this is presented.
- Despite the general acceptance of the 'three ages' over half a century earlier, the inhabitants prior to the Roman invasion seem to be defined by flint tools.
- And Maiden Castle was obviously Roman since why would the Durotriges have needed more than Poundbury and the other hillforts. Nor could the Durotriges have built such a thing, rather ignoring that he accepts they made other hillforts (e.g. Hambledon below), and that the case for it being Roman work was comprehensively demolished in a Proceedings article only 2 years earlier. In any case, an old shepherd had said "The Romangs (sic) made this, sir; they was double jointed people as strong as 'orses."

It's a pity that, at a time when solid progress was being made in understanding the past, such a poorly argued article should find space in the Proceedings. Sadly, Cunnington's other article, on Hambledon (and a little on Hod), is similarly poor; I gave up on reading that it was built long before the Durotriges (no reason given), by people with neither sheep nor cattle (why?) and who "required no water supply"!

In fact, an article entitled *Antiquities of Dorchester*, rather makes the point in saying that proper research is needed to provide evidence of things taken as fact which are really speculation. These often come from fanciful (my word) notions of antiquarians in the past when knowledge has improved considerably. Edward Cunnington is faintly praised. For example, various interpretations of Maumbury Rings relating to its use as a Roman amphitheatre and subsequently a gun platform in the Civil War, could easily be settled by limited excavations. The supposed layout of Roman Dorchester could be considerably clarified if all the observations of roads and building remains were properly examined, recorded and mapped.

The article on King John's visits to Dorset, in *From the Archives 13*, also included other details from the ancient records which I didn't summarise. A follow-up says that the woods around Gillingham, the most visited town, had been favourite royal hunting grounds for several reigns, and John spent £280 in renovating the mansion there, apparently around £470,000 now but rather less than on the accommodation in Corfe – see Graham Hoddinott's article in the last newsletter.

Volume XVII of the Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History and Antiquarian Field Club is dated 1896 but, as noted previously, seems to have been published in 1897 'for' 1896.

I found one article particularly encouraging, not so much for its archaeological information as for the clear description of what was done and found, and honesty about where and why conclusions were uncertain. *An Early Neolithic Kitchen-midden and Tufaceous Deposit at Blashenwell, near Corfe Castle*, by Clement Reid, is as much concerned with natural history as archaeology in examining this layer of tufa – a calcareous rock formed by deposition of minerals from water (not to be confused with volcanic tuff, which is often described as tufa). Here, an 8 foot thick layer of tufa came from springs from the Purbeck Ridge, but had stopped forming by the Roman period as the top foot was a dark soil with Roman coins and pottery at the base. Several different layers of tufa below that are described, and the article identifies the different types of snail found in each.

There is a clear set of arguments as to why the Neolithic layer was such, based on the worked flints found, remains of bones from food animals, and the types of snails – which are then linked to the environmental conditions which then applied. The Romano-British layer has a completely new set of land snails, i.e. those found in open countryside. Mr Reid hoped that land snail identification might become useful in archaeological dating, even though it was really the artefacts here that dated the top layer. As far as I can find out, radiocarbon dating from snail shells can be helpful except where the shells incorporate fragments of local stone, which skews the results; a particular problem in limestone areas.

Geoff Taylor

EDAS PROGRAMME 2024

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

Wed 10th January	Zoom lecture	David Reeve	The oldest secular buildings in Wimborne
Wed 14th February	Lecture	Miles Russell	Frampton Villa excavations STARTS 7:45 PLEASE DON'T ARRIVE BEFORE 7:15
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.

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://ibseyhall.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:** See 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.