

SOUTH OXFORDSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGICAL GROUP

BULLETIN NO.15.

SEPTEMBER 1971

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Subscriptions: those still outstanding should be paid to the Hon. Treasurer a.s.a.p.

Meetings. 18th July. Some 40 members met at Stoke Row, by kind invitation of Mrs. G. Sheridan.

10th Sept. Some 16 members met at the Thatched Cottage by kind invitation of the President. A committee meeting was held beforehand. Short reports were given on recent activities and future arrangements discussed. Clive Hart showed the results of field work plotted on 6 in. Ordnance maps and exhibited the partially reconstructed late mediaeval cooking pot recovered in fragments from the oil pipe line excavations in the field adjoining the Thatched Cottage. Members also examined the photostat copies of the Whitchurch and Whitchurch Hill Enclosure Maps (1800 and 1806), recently obtained for the Group. Mr. French suggested that a meeting should be arranged with the Goring Historical Soc. to discuss and exchange information on the materials for local studies.

Calendar of activities Sept. to Nov.

- Sat. Sept. 25. Lilley Farm. 2.30 p.m. (SU 678768) W.J. Fowler.
Sun. Oct. 3. Lilley Farm. 11 a.m.
Sun. Oct. 10. Fieldwork. Meet at the Thatched Cottage. 11 a.m. C. Hart. (Bring packed lunch)
Sat. Oct. 16. Lilley Farm. as above from 11 a.m.
Sat. Oct. 30. Lilley Farm. as above from 11 a.m.
Sat. Nov. 6. Well. Meet at White Gables, Stoke Row. 11 a.m. (G. Sheridan)
Sun. Nov. 14. Well. as above
Sun. Nov. 21. Fieldwork as on Oct. 10 above
Sun. Nov. 28. Well. as above from 11 a.m.

General meeting Friday Oct. 8th at the Thatched Cottage, Whitchurch Hill. 7.30 p.m.

Members will note that fieldwork has now to take place at the weekends as there is not enough daylight in the evenings. It is hoped to arrange a guided visit to the Ashmolean Museum during the winter, and there is a possibility that a short course of lectures may be held in the New Year.

Excursion. It was unfortunate that so few members in the end supported this visit to the Avebury, under the guidance of Clive Hart. However, an enjoyable day was spent by 7 members on 18th Sept. The first stop was made at the Sanctuary, where the avenue to Avebury began, and the group then went on to the West Kennet Long Barrow and then climbed Silbury Hill before reaching Avebury by way of the Avenue, of large standing stones. A visit to the Museum was followed by a walk round the 'henge' and associated banks. On the return journey, 'Celtic' fields, barrows were observed and a group of thatched estate cottages c. 1800 and the Norman church at Avington Manor seen.

Reports on work in hand.

Fieldwork. Clive Hart reports: We have made a survey of every field, woodland and coppice in the parish of Goring Heath with some very satisfactory results. By coordinating our walks with the help of O.S. 1 in. first edition maps of 1831 and the enclosure maps we have plotted ancient 'greenways', quarries and field systems. We would like to thank Dick Aston of the City and County Museum for his assistance.

Work will continue during the winter in this parish and in the neighbouring parishes of Woodcote, South Stoke and Goring.

Well and Whitchurch Hill. Reports of the excavations round the well head and of the mediaeval gully at Whitchurch Hill are nearing completion and, with the finds, will be deposited in the City and County Museum at Woodstock.

Lilley Farm. What little work has been done recently has shown more clearly that we have a much more complex and extensive foundation structure than at first appeared. Only complete uncovering of this - not particularly exciting as to date small finds are few - will answer our questions. We are still hoping to be able to obtain access to the estate records.

W.J.F.

### An Archaeological Revolution?

Conclusions arising from recent work are a challenge to many well founded beliefs about the prehistoric period in Europe. Advances in scientific dating have shown that many artifacts and monuments may be much older than we have thought. You may have noticed for instance that up to date references to Stonehenge may place the beginnings in the middle of the third millenium B.C. instead of about 1800 B.C. i.e. about 700 years earlier.

Some twenty years ago the first radiocarbon dating pushed back the beginning of the Neolithic some thousands of years. Now, a second radiocarbon 'revelation' has far more fundamental implications than a mere matter of dating. This newest advance is based on a comparison of a long chronological sequence, obtained from the tree rings of the Californian bristlecone pine, with the radiocarbon determinations from the wood itself. The calibration sets the latter back some 700 years and applies to Europe, but not to the Middle East and Egypt, where application of the calibration has generally confirmed accepted chronology and in fact cleared up some discrepancies.

'The whole of Europe becomes 700 years older at a stroke! It follows that the megalithic tombs of Great Britain and Brittany could be older than the Pyramids, and Silbury Hill as old. Stonehenge could have achieved its final form before the Mycenaean civilisation arose, thus destroying the theory, based on the inscribed axes and daggers on some of the stones, that Mycenaean architects helped.

But the matter goes further than this. The whole concept of 'modified diffusion' as formulated by Gordon Childe, on which our view of the development of our society has been based for a generation, is in question. We need no longer necessarily hold that all the major advances - agriculture, ~~XXX~~ metallurgy - were only made once and came West into Europe among 'savage' peoples. To emphasize that our ancestors were not so backward Professor Thom, a civil engineer by profession, is convinced after 30 years work that the people here some 4000 years ago 'had developed a definite meteorology and geometry'

'I must stress that these conclusions are tentative... at present we are only beginning to recover from our surprise that these things are as early as they seem to be...'

Summarized from Colin Renfrew, Revolution in Prehistory. The Listener vol. 84 no. 2179 pp. 897-900, vol. 85, no. 2180, pp. 12-15; Thom, the Megaliths of Carnac, Listener 84, 2179, 900-1. (31 Dec. 1970, 7 Jan. 1971)

### Notes and News.

Oxbone in Wall. During reconstruction at the New Inn, Widmore End, a large ox bone was found in a 17th century wattle and daub wall. This may relate to an ancient foundation rite of putting various objects - bones, shoes etc - in the wall of a house. (Bedfordshire Magazine vol. 5 no. 39) C. Hart.

Members at large. Various members have worked during the Summer on 'digs' at Totsworth (M40 Research Gp.), Middleton Stoney (E.B. building within motte and bailey) 'Cadcong', Somerset (Dark Age reocc. of I.A.

Others have been to Spain and to Venice, and will not have been blind to historical and archaeological aspects. Brittany was also visited.

CBA Gp. IX There will be a day meeting at Wolverton, Bucks, on Nov. 13. Full details later.

This is following the practice that the Autumn meeting should be in rotation in the counties comprising the Group. The Spring meeting will take the form of a weekend at Oxford, as last year.

### Some books.

Geoffrey Bibby, The Testimony of the Spade. Pontene Library, Collins (12/6 old style)  
Popular accounts of all the classic European sites and finds, from the painted caves to Tollund Man, by way of Skara Brae and Stonehenge among many others. Illustrated - very good value.

Stuart Piggott, Approach to Archaeology. Pelican 25p. A good introduction especially to methods and techniques.

Glyn Daniel, The origins and Growth of Archaeology. Pelican. 30 p.

A clear and readable account of the evolution of the discipline over 300 years.

Current Archaeology. The subscription to this has had to be raised to £1.50 a year for six copies (postal subscriptions only) but it is still excellent value and is essential to anyone wishing to keep in touch with what is going on in archaeology in this country today. At least one issue is devoted to work outside Great Britain.

Request. If any member has nos. 17 and 18 (Nov. '69 and Jan. '70, could these please be returned to the Editor. All the other copies on loan have come home - thanks.

PLEASE DO NOT THROW THIS AWAY. CONTRIBUTIONS INVITED. NEXT ISSUE NOVEMBER.

W.J.F. 22 Sept. 1971.

P.S. The address of Current Archaeology is: 9 Nassington Rd., London NW3 2TX

17. Hedgcock.