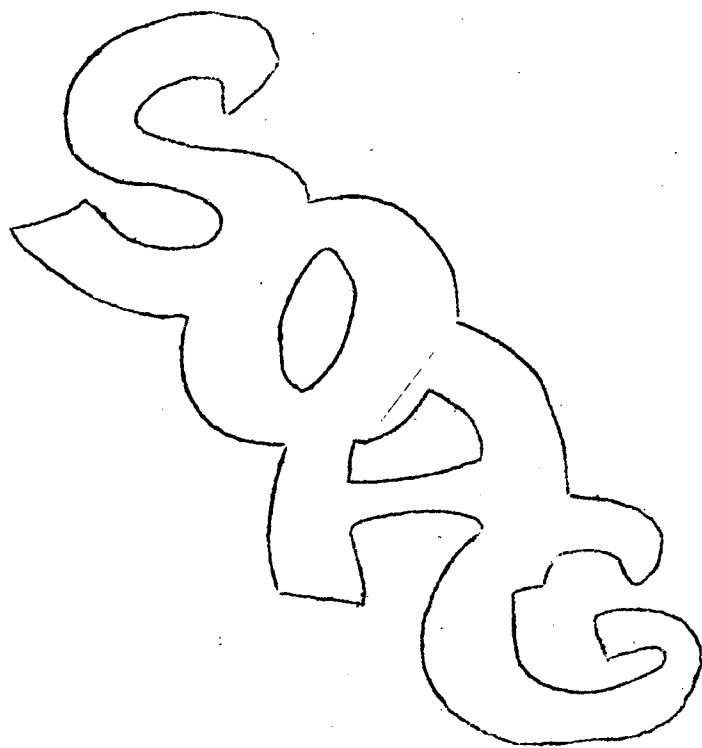


THE
BULLETIN



SOUTH OXFORDSHIRE
ARCHAEOLOGICAL GROUP

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Bulletin No. 32

January 1977

S.O.A.G. DIARY

Friday 18th February: K. Martin Horswell. FCIS FBS
on "Mission to the Chilterns."

Sunday 20th March: A.G.M. Mrs. Avril Hassall on
"Backyard Archaeology." 3 p.m. in the
Common Room at Langtree Centre. (Please
bring a few cakes or biscuits).

Thursday 28th April: To be arranged.

We hope to start fieldwalking again in February -
details will be announced at the monthly
meetings.

Weekend courses at Rewley House, Wellington Square,
Oxford. Details on request from Mrs Fallowfield

26th - 27th March: CBA Group 9 Annual Conference.

6th - 8th May: Coins and Archaeology.

14th - 15th May: New Approaches to the Archaeology
of Cemeteries.

15th - 17th April: The Archaeology of Mercian Towns.

16th - 23rd July: The Mediaeval Buildings of Oxford.

SOAG Christmas Party.

One of our best parties yet, with 32 people present, was held in the Adair Room at the Oratory School on December 13th. We were greeted by the President, a lovely log fire, and Bernard behind the Bar. Liz and Ruth provided a superb spread of quiches, flans, mousses and other delights, and we congratulated them both on their cooking and judging of quantity - no easy task - and their efforts were beyond praise. Ian, Alistair and Paul acted as Bernards Bar-Boys, and our thanks are due to them for managing the drinks. We were very glad to have the Headmaster and Mrs Snow as our guests, and thanked them warmly for the loan of the room. The President arranged a "Guess What?" competition of assorted artifacts which kept everybody busy and amused. We even had a bit of Pyramid lent by a new Soag! We were delighted to have so many visitors, and gained three new Soags during this very successful evening.

The Gas Pipe-line Survey.

On January 20th we had an interesting lecture by Mr Gatherall (Archaeologist to British Gas Pipe-lines) on the Archaeological work on the pipe-line that has just been driven across Southern England. The following article sums up what we were able to do to help, and what we learnt from him.

The pipe was duly laid during the Summer and Autumn of '76, and most people must have seen something of the large machinery, the deep trench, the huge piles of earth and the lengths of enormous pipe which were eventually let down into place and covered over. But what of the archaeology? - you must all have wondered.

A dozen or so of us had surveyed the route in December '75 and we had been expecting to be called upon again during the pipe-laying operation. In fact I had been round finding out when people would be available and collecting signatures for permits.

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As time went on, the Gas Board started introducing more and more restrictions and conditions of access, until finally - as we learned at the meeting - they decided they could not allow any amateurs on the site at all. Their fear was partly that there could be accidents (the machines are very large and dangerous!) and partly that too many archaeologists would hold up their work (their time is very expensive).

Meanwhile, Richard Chambers (Oxford Archaeological Unit) had been seconded to the Gas Board, and he was employed full time to record and survey in our area while the machines were working. Thus the line did have professional archaeological attention.

As it turned out, he found very little of interest in SOAG territory. One exception was some indications of a Deserted Mediaeval Village in the fields around Little Stoke. Our group that surveyed this area in December '75 had recrded various bumps in one field there, and this, as far as I can make out, probably coincides with this DMV

A section through Grin's Ditch at Nuffield was also obtained, but showed no unusual features, except that the ditch was rather shallow, and the bank had no revetment.

There was, however, one rather intriguing point worth mentioning. When they cut across the Dorchester? Silchester Roman road, near Cholsey, the section seemed to show that the line of the road was pointing towards the river, and not South, as would be expected. If it did cross the river, it would be going through SOAG territory.

And so that ends another episode in the life of SOAG. All I can say is that we did what was asked of us..... Incidentally, there are rumours of another pipe coming across in the future - any volunteers?

B.L.

Anglo-Saxon Symposium. The Archaeology of Anglo-Saxon Churches.

This is a short account of just a few of the most interesting lectures in a symposium attended by many

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well-known archaeological personalities. At first there were few questions and comments till the whole gathering was sternly taken to task on the subject by Dr. Thomas. After that the discussion was much more interesting, particularly where there were rival theories and interpretations of the evidence available.

Some speakers based their deductions about long-vanished buildings on the descriptions of them in ancient documents. Among these was Dr. Gen, speaking about Athelney, Wilton, and timber church building in the 9th and 10th centuries. For the appearance and construction of the church at Athelney, he drew evidence from the Life of King Alfred, in which Asser refers to the church being most richly decorated, and defended by a fortress. In a later description by William of Malmesbury great wooden posts are mentioned; these were probably free-standing in the nave, and held up the roof, which must have been of timber (post holes for large pillars placed in the same position were found during excavations of the church at Potterne). For the church at Wilton, Dr Gen referred to a description of a chapel built there by Edith, daughter of King Edmund. It was made of wood on a masonry foundation, and could have been constructed like the church at Greenstead, which has closely-set timbers in a sole-plate. There was reference to paintings by Berra which could have been on a boarded roof, and the use of horse's hide on the walls.

The richness of Saxon churches was also mentioned by Professor Rosemary Cramp when talking about excavations in northern churches, notably those at Escomb, Monkwearmouth and Jarrow. She explained how they were constructed; some, like Escomb, have foundations made by digging a trench and filling it with boulders and clay, and then putting ashlar walls on top. Others, such as Monkwearmouth, had walls made of rubble built up between shuttering, and then plastered inside and out, and often incised and coloured. Fragments of coloured glass found at Jarrow indicate the presence of glazed windows, which which were probably made by Gaulish glaziers. At

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Escomb there were also glass windows of a later date, paler in colour, and inferior in quality. The interior of Saxon churches must have been much more highly coloured and cluttered than we realise. Furniture was carved, portals were decorated with strapwork, and vestiges still remain in the carving of the original colour. The stone seat at Hexham was not the only one of its kind, as remains of four others of similar design have been found, as well as fragments of a carved reading desk at Jarrow. Tombs were quite elaborate, with painted inscriptions and draperies carved in stone.

Another interesting lecture was given by Derek Phillips on Excavation Techniques at York Minster (this could hardly be said to be about Saxon churches, because this was just what the excavation did not find). Digging inside the Minster was in the sequence dictated by the engineering problems of repairs. The foundations were always full of water, and as all heating had been turned off the humidity was so high that unless the soil was treated as it was dug, everything was covered with white mould in twelve hours. Pneumatic drills necessitated ear-plugs, and masks had to be worn because of the fumes. As excavation proceeded, the western towers started sinking at the alarming rate of a millimetre a week, and because of this digging went on ~~kw~~24 hours a day. So that no evidence should be missed, a great number of colour photographs were taken from cameras slung under tripods. Infra-red and special long-exposure film was used, and colour prints made which could be examined with a magnifying glass later.

The last lecture of the Symposium was given by Warwick Rodwell. He gave five main causes of destruction of evidence in church and churchyard. These were: grave digging, which destroyed all the strata; building works near the church; dissipation of evidence by demolition and decay; and restoration. Many churches were extensively restored in Victorian times, and in putting in new floors the interior of the church was dug out, and evidence of previous floors largely destroyed. Where churches are now being restored destruction of evidence is still more serious. The most injurious modern practice is that of cutting a channel all round the

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church walls and lining it with concrete. In most cases there is no opportunity for investigation, and no record is made of anything found when the work is done. All evidence of previous building on the same site, or alterations to the present church building, is destroyed.

M.P.F.

British Archaeological Reports at 122 Banbury Road, Oxford, have now produced 30 Volumes on British Archaeology and 7 Volumes on Archaeology abroad. Some are excavation reports, others are Conference reports, or Catalogues of one type of find.

No. 30, "Studies in the Archaeology and History of Cirencester" is based on 14 papers presented to a seminar last year. Alan McWhirter has edited 200 pages, 113 on the Roman, Saxon and Mediaeval town, the rest on the last 250 years.

Archaeological Magazines.

There have been many attempts to publish such magazines (as distinct from the weighty journals of learned societies) but most have ceased publication, such as "The Reliquary, or Illustrated Archaeologist", "Discovery", and "Archaeological Newsletter". "Antiquity" was founded 50 years ago by O.G.S. Crawford the Reading educated archaeological officer at the Ordnance Survey. It carries short reports on all aspects of world archaeology. More subscribers are desperately needed to avert a financial crisis. The subscription is £7.50 for 3 volumes a year from 104 Hills Road, Cambridge.

Current Archaeology still struggles on, being distributed 10 months after the cover date. Six numbers with 32 glossy pages for £2.50 a year from 9 Nassington Rd, London NW3. No. 53 contains notes on Reading University's Aldermaston dig which revealed a plough-damaged Roman bath house and a previously unknown Bronze Age farm. Also a long article on the "Durobrivae hoard", the silver plate of a Roman church apparently buried in the 4th century. The treasure, which was ploughed up two years ago, will go on

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display in the British Museum on April 1st. Rescue News started as a quarterly newsletter of the Trust for British Archaeology. It is now published twice a year at 15p or free to members. No. 12, the latest issue, questions the rôle of Rescue now. Govt. funds have multiplied 10 times. It also reports the unrecorded destruction of two miles of Wats Dyke on the Welsh border; although it has been scheduled since 1934, ploughing and other damage continues. This reminds us to keep a regular check on Grim's Ditch and other major sites. Address: 15a Bull Plain, Hertford. Pompeii AD 79 Exhibition at the Royal Academy, Piccadilly until 27th Feb. The £2 catalogue may be the best value of the multitude of books published or re-issued for the exhibition. John Ward Perkins and Amanda Claridge have compiled 208 illustrated pages and 24 colour plates, with a folding plan of the city.

The 338 exhibits, including 70 sections cut from wall paintings, are divided between seven rooms. Many small objects are displayed in cases against the wall, preventing all-round viewing; where this is possible, labels are on one side only. Most of the objects are "great Art", including some lovely mosaics, but there are few normal domestic objects, and none of the pornographic paintings or political graffiti that made Pompeii famous. Pompeii is often taken as a complete Roman town, frozen in time; however the buildings, some centuries old and of Greek origin, were mostly ruined by an earthquake in A.D. 62, and looted by the townspeople when the dust had settled. The exhibition should be visited by all interested in Roman archaeology, including "I Claudius" viewers. After all the queues are shorter than those for Tutankhamen! G.T.

Notes on Fieldswalks for new Members.

If you are not a great walker, do not take fright at these projects. We amble along quite easily, as there is always something to be looked at. Wear sensible clothes - a waterproof, comfortable shoes or boots, thick socks and gloves. Travel light, but pencil and notebook are often useful. Don't be afraid if

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you know nothing - you will soon learn. Bring a little money. We try to lunch in a pub if the weather is cold (or near it if it isn't!). Hot coffee is useful in cold weather.

These fieldwalks entail much 'organising' - getting permission to explore people's land is not always easy - so please back up your hard-working Committee and support as many walks and outings (even more complicated) as you can; help us to put SOAG yet more on the map. YOU may be the one who finds the piece of pottery, or notices the unknown earthwork. Come and try!

Anything falling down in your area?

Would any member be willing to report on any building of interest which is falling or being pulled down in his/her area. This is very valuable work which need not take long. If any member notices any building at risk and has not time to examine it, please phone Reading 471647, and an effort will be made to record it.

The following is a specimen report.

Position At Chazey Heath beside A4074 between Cornwood Cottage and Myrtle Cottage - grid ref: SU 694775.

Construction Main part of building timber box frame on brick and knapped flint plinth. Infill of box frame mainly brick, with remnant of wattle and daub in north gable end. Later additions, chimney stack and lapped timber outhouse at south end. Thatched roof in very ruinous condition. Estimated age of main building - 18th century.

This concludes the report, but the investigation was interesting. At first it seemed impossible to find out the construction of the plinth as it had been cemented over inside and out, but a small section which had escaped repair was found in the wash-house. The wattle and daub remnant was partially concealed by the chimney stack. Most of the lath and plaster ceiling of the upstairs room is missing, so the rafters can be seen to be unshaped straight poles, rather like the old type of clothes-prop. It was not possible to take a good photograph of the building due to over-growth.

M.P.F.