

March 2016

Dear Members,

The archaeological work at Hinkley Point goes on. Early in 2015 an unexpected find was a Saxon burial ground containing 200 skeletons. In November Richard Young and his colleague from Cotswold Archaeology gave a comprehensive review of the findings so far, culminating in the recent finds.



Some of the Saxon burials at Hinkley Point

The Christmas meeting at Wembdon Community Centre was its usual success and was enlivened by Bob Croft's review of the past two years, which included a video that he made of 'The Lady in Lead' - a Roman burial at Silchester. Thank you to everyone who contributed to the splendid eats.

In January Chris Webster of the Somerset Heritage Trust talked about the defences of the southwest during the Second World War. In retrospect it is difficult to understand the thinking behind some of the plans - for example it was thought the Germans might mount an aerial invasion of the Brendon Hills and move north to establish a beachhead at Watchet, even though they did not have planes with the range or carrying capacity to do this. The topic is fully investigated in a recent book co-authored by Chris.

The AGM of the Society was held on February 18th. In his Report, our Chairman David Baker said:

First of all I would like to commemorate two of our long-standing and active members who died during last year; Peter Cattermole who died in March and Hazel Coombes who died in August. This is not the place for eulogies; there is too much to say but we shall miss them both. So I ask you all, please, to stand and remember them for a minute in silence.

After our AGM on February 19th 2015 Hannah West shared with us the results of her

Ph.D. research into St. Johns Hospital and Bridgwater Friary. On March 19th Laura Burnett, Finds Liaison Officer for the Somerset Heritage Trust explained how the Portable Antiquities Scheme operates and showed us beautiful photos of some exceptional finds. In April Derek Gibson of the Civic Society took us on a verbal ramble round historic Bridgwater. On May 16th we visited Woodspring Priory north of Worle, an Augustinian foundation now run by the Landmark Trust. It was their open day and Vince Russet kindly showed us round the well-preserved medieval buildings. In June we met Jerry Sampson the official archaeologist of Wells Cathedral who gave us a most fascinating and detailed tour of that magnificent mediaeval edifice. Our annual dinner at the Enmore Inn on June 16th was a well attended and enjoyable occasion. Many thanks to Chris Sidaway for showing us round Enmore Church beforehand. Two days later I did a guided tour of historic Bridgwater as part of the CBA Festival of Archaeology. Although only two ladies attended it was very pleasant and I did not have to shout.

On September 17th we made a coach excursion to Cirencester in the morning and Chedworth Roman Villa in the afternoon. Aubrey had arranged for a guide in both places and we also had time to visit the excellent Cirencester Museum. We were well represented at the AGM of the SANHS Associated Societies at North Cadbury on October 3rd. Later that month we had a talk by Richard Young of Cotswold Archaeology on the Saxon burials recently discovered at Hinkley Point. On November 19th the planned talk by Vince Russet fell through so Aubrey saved the day by telling us about his discoveries while on holiday in Dalmatia. At our Christmas celebration on December 17th the buffet provided by the good number of members who attended was delicious as was the presentation given by our old friend Bob Croft. Finally on January 21st this year many of you braved the elements to attend Chris Webster's talk on the coastal defences of Somerset during the Second World War.

Many thanks to Aubrey for an interesting and varied programme, to Alan our secretary, to Jill our treasurer, to the other members of the committee and to all our members for their support. You have all contributed to another successful year for the society. I conclude with my usual appeal for members to put forward ideas as to what you want the society to do, to volunteer to help in any way you can or even join the committee.

The AGM was followed by a talk by Jill Polak on Bridgwater's brass-founders. There was a thriving industry making cooking vessels and so on in the 18th & early 19th centuries, but this is little documented. Jill described her searches through various records to find out more about the companies involved.

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

March 17th. 7.30 p.m. at the Blake Museum

Andrew Butcher 'Rethinking the records: Mediaeval Bridgwater and After'
Bridgwater's mediaeval were published in five volumes of the Somerset Record Society between 1933 and 1971 and give a unique insight into mediaeval ports, boroughs and town life. However these records fall short of the current standards of interpretation and this talk is an introduction to a modern edition which would show the rich cultural complexity of the original records. It will also review the Borough's neglected post- mediaeval records which offer a full social, economic and political understanding of Bridgwater.

April 21st. 7.30 p.m. at the Blake Museum

Martin Papworth (National Trust) 'Recent Excavations at Chedworth Roman Villa'
Martin led an investigation of an unexplored area of the villa site last summer. In fact the dig had been back-filled by the time we visited in September.

Saturday, May 21st. 2.00 p.m. Excursion to Banwell Caves by car. This unusual site is now only open to organised parties.

Booking essential- details will be sent out in due course.

June 16th. 7.30 p.m. at the Blake Museum

Brian Wright 'Andrew Crosse of Fyne Court'
Andrew Crosse (1784 - 1855) was a gentleman scientist, a poet and an eccentric landowner. He thought that he had created life during one of his electrical experiments and this may have inspired Mary Shelley to write 'Frankenstein'.

July 21st. 6.30 for 7.30 p.m. Annual Dinner at the Tudor Restaurant, Bridgwater

Booking essential- details will be sent out in due course.

September 15th. 8.30 a.m. at Bridgwater Bus Station.

Excursion by coach to the Welsh Border Castles, visiting Monmouth, Raglan & White Castles.

Booking essential- details will be sent out in due course.

OTHER EVENTS

We hope to visit Sydenham Manor (courtesy of EDF) and the current excavation site at Hinkley Point (courtesy of EDF) when and if these can be arranged. We will give as much notice as possible.

March 29th. 10.00 a.m. The Blake Museum is celebrating its 90th anniversary this year and there will be an opening ceremony at the Museum after the winter closure.