



# Yeovil Archaeological and Local History Society

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## Newsletter

**No. 16**

**June 2006**



The face of modern, developer-funded archaeology. A professional in 'PPE' (Personal Protective Equipment: high vis. vest and hardhat) excavates a series of prehistoric postholes. Where does amateur archaeology fit into this picture? What role do we have to play? Are we becoming redundant? Email your views to [yeovilarchaeology@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:yeovilarchaeology@yahoo.co.uk)

## Editorial

It has been a busy year so far for the Society. We hosted an event with SANHS on metal detecting, Brian Gittos has been undertaking a watching brief at St John's (a rare example of amateur archaeology fitting into the modern planning process), the Brooke-Hayward award has been re-established to reward new and innovative contributions to *Chronicle* and, of course, the campaign to save Foundry House (supported by so many members) was successful. As a Society we should think about how we can influence the planning process and what impact we can have on maintaining the town's historic environment.

We can be contacted at: [jamesgerrard2003@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:jamesgerrard2003@yahoo.co.uk). Any attachments as Microsoft Word (.DOC) or TEXT (.TXT) files please.

*James and Sally.*

## Cadbury Day

The annual round-up of findings from Cadbury will take place in the Village Hall, North Cadbury on the 25<sup>th</sup> June. A variety of papers including: a discussion of Britain's earliest metalworking site (1500BC), pottery in the Dark Ages and WWII Airfields (no prizes for guessing who's giving those talks!). More details from R. Tabor.



## **YALHS Programme**

### **Spring - Summer 2006**

*All lectures take place at 7:30pm in Holy Trinity Church, Lysander Road, Yeovil. Visitors are very welcome and are charged £1.50 per meeting (not £1 as misprinted in the last Chronicle)*

### **Other Events**

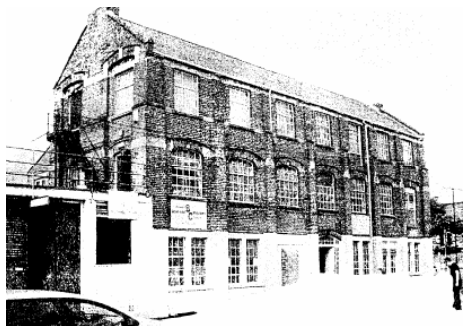
#### ***The Archaeology of Mendip and its Environs 11-12 November 2006***

This two-day conference, held at the medieval Bishop's Palace in Wells, has as its focus the archaeology of the Mendip Hills and its environs. Around twenty speakers will present the results of new research and new ideas about the rich archaeological sequence of the region, a sequence that stretches back half a million years. The cost is £35 for the two days (including refreshments): concessions £25. For more information contact Dr Jodie Lewis, Department of Applied Sciences, Geography and Archaeology, University of Worcester, Henwick Grove, Worcester WR2 6AJ. Telephone 01905 855182. Email [jodie.lewis@worc.ac.uk](mailto:jodie.lewis@worc.ac.uk) <<mailto:jodie.lewis@worc.ac.uk>>

## **FOUNDRY HOUSE – a bit of Yeovil’s history saved.**

First of all, it’s not a Foundry! This building, opposite the Multiplex at the bottom of Stars Lane, Yeovil, is a purpose-built glove factory. Erected by Ewens and Johnson in the 1870s (their initials can still be seen on the iron tie-bars,) it must have been a model factory for its time; big iron-framed windows, fireplaces on each floor, and hamstone bands and detailing, all suggesting real pride in the undertaking.

The factory not only made gloves, it processed those sewn by outworkers. The town was the gloving centre of Britain then, and perhaps the world. But as post-war imports took their toll, the factory changed hands in the ‘40s, and ceased gloving in the 50s. It continued in light industrial use - hence ‘Foundry’- and was purchased by the District Council in the 80s. A few years ago they



were advised that it was the most important part of the Mill Lane complex, and so saved it when the rest were bulldozed.

Official memories are short, however, and in 2004 SSDC voted for demolition. Some Councillors did not even know that it had been a gloving factory; others, perhaps, wanted to leave the industrial past behind. When I learnt (in January) that it was to come down in February, I put a letter in the Gazette, and a small band of friends took to the Town with leaflets and petitions. Popular support was amazing, and in a month there were 3,000 signatures on the petition. SSDC began to falter. Then in mid-March our bid for spot-listing was approved; ‘Listed Grade 2’: Hurrah!

We learnt so much: how much people cared about their industrial heritage, and how angry they were at the catalogue of past destruction in Yeovil; how Councillors’ attitudes did not reflect this;

And above all, how research and campaigning go hand in hand, each ineffective without the other. We discovered, for example, that despite centuries of gloving, Yeovil had NO listed gloving premises (- the Reckleford tannery was misdescribed as a glove factory). And that Stanley Johnson, grandson of the founder, gave Yeovil, inter alia, its Football and Rugby Grounds, its theatre and its College – all paid for by that old building that was nearly knocked down.

SSDC accepted the listing, and are now seeking partners to give a new life to this building that symbolises so much of the town's past. All ideas welcome!

David Gordon.

### **The Brooke-Hayward Award**

The Brooke-Hayward award was established by Leslie Brooke and Leonard Hayward to reward new, original and meritorious contributions to the Society's journal *Chronicle*. To be eligible an article should be written by a member who has not previously contributed in a substantial manner to the journal. The paper should cover an aspect of the archaeology or history of Yeovil or its surroundings and be approximately 750-1500 words long. The winner of the award will be decided upon by the Committee and the award (a certificate and £25 in book tokens) presented at the AGM in May. Further details are available from the Hon. Editor Brian Gittos.

### **From the Treasurer**

*Subscriptions are due on 1st January* and if you have not already made a remittance it would be appreciated if this can be done. If members have a standing order would you please check that it's for the correct amount:

Individual £6.50  
Junior/Student £1

Couples £9.50

Family £11

## Visit to Ottery St Mary

The Society's full day summer visit this year is to Ottery St Mary and the Beer Caves, both in Devon. At Ottery, we will visit the church



which was rebuilt on a very grand scale in the middle of the 14th century. The lay-out was modelled on that of the Bishop's Cathedral at Exeter and a College of Priests was established to act as a grand chantry to the Bishop's family. Although extensively restored in 19th century much remains to tell us about how it was designed, how it functioned and about the people involved.

The Beer Caves were man made and are actually a quarry in use over some 2000 years. It produced the fine-grained white limestone known as Beer Stone which was used for the important buildings of the area, including Exeter cathedral. Within the caves, the different periods of quarrying can be seen, distinguished by the different stone cutting techniques which have been used over the centuries ([www.beerquarrycaves.fsnet.co.uk](http://www.beerquarrycaves.fsnet.co.uk)). Finally, depending on time and weather, it may also be possible to include a visit the seaside at Beer itself.

Members should make their way to Ottery by own transport (A303/A30, sign posted after the Honiton bypass). There is limited parking near the church and so it will pay to arrive in good time. Meet at the main entrance to the parish church at 10:30 am for guided tour, led by Brian and Moira Gittos. Contributions to church funds from members would be welcomed. There will be a break for lunch from about 12:30. Members might wish to bring their own food but there are several places in and around Ottery which provide refreshments. The party will reconvene at the Beer Caves at 2:00pm. The cost of entry is £5.50 per head (£3.95 for concessions). All those wishing to join the party should contact Brian and Moira Gittos, in advance. Then we will know who to expect and will also have the opportunity to confirm the arrangements and assist with directions, if necessary.

## Archaeology at St. John's Church, Yeovil

In February 2006 a major programme of work (the “re-ordering”) began at Yeovil’s parish church. This is still in progress and is not due to be completed until the end of July. It involves the removal of the old internal fittings from the tower and lowering its floor level to that of the nave. A toilet, new vergers’ office and storage area are being constructed under the tower together with a first floor gallery and access staircase. The west doors will be truncated such that the only the lower three-quarters are allowed to open outwards. Pews have been removed from the west end of the nave and the old wooden floor concreted ready for tiling. A sink unit will be installed at the west end of the north nave aisle. To service this and the new toilet a drain has been installed externally, along almost the full length of the north side of the church. The south porch has been provided with a new threshold, flush with the outside paving and new iron gates have been installed which are the full height of the entrance. At the east end of the nave a row of pews has been taken out right across the church and the wooden floor is being replaced by concrete and tiles. One row of pews has been taken out from both sides of the chancel to provide a more open view of the main altar. Again the exposed areas of wooden flooring are to be concreted and tiled.

All this work has warranted archaeological supervision and recording. It was agreed with the church authorities and the County Council’s head of archaeology Bob Croft that Brian Gittos, under the auspices of the YALHS, should carry out this work. This has necessitated numerous lunchtime, and occasional weekend, visits. It has proved very rewarding and has shed new light on the building’s history. The highlights have included the exposure of the foundations of the piers at the west end of the nave and the discovery of several brick built tomb vaults below the floor of the church. The most spectacular of these was located in the churchyard just outside the west door (see illustration). Also below the floor at the west end of the nave was discovered the grave slab of William Bide who died in 1829. *Continued overleaf*

## Archaeology at St. John's continued

As might be expected, the service trench through the graveyard uncovered many human bones, which were all suitably re-buried. Amongst the small finds have been sherds of medieval pottery, oyster shells and several fragments of medieval glazed floor tiles. One of these, found inside the church, appears to have been heraldic. There have been many examples of worked Ham stone. A single piece, from within the church, preserves what appears to be some of the late 17<sup>th</sup> century yellow ochre paint, which was so zealously removed from the interior stone work, during the late 1850s restoration.

A preliminary account of the findings so far was given to the Friends of St. Johns after their AGM on 11<sup>th</sup> May. A more detailed account will appear in the next *Chronicle* and a full report will be present to the Church and Somerset County Council's Historic Environment Department. It is hoped that it will also be possible to obtain funding to publish the final report.



The brick tomb outside of the West Door of St. John's Church, Yeovil.  
Brian Gittos