



Yeovil Archaeological and Local History Society

Chairman: Bill Chapman
Vice Chair: Duncan Black
Secretary: Vacant
Newsletter: Vacant
Treasurer: Jill Garner
Website:
www.yalhs.org.uk

Newsletter

No. 17

April 2007

As you will notice above there are a number of issues which need to be addresses at the **Annual General Meeting** of the Society on **Friday 5th May** at the usual venue of Holy Trinity Church Hall.

We hope to appoint a secretary and a newsletter editor and to reveal our exciting new website, from which we expect great things.

Yalhs Programme

Friday 4th May

Our **AGM** will be followed by an opportunity for members to bring any mystery or unidentified objects. The membership will be able to offer their ideas or perhaps knowledge on these objects.

Friday evening 22nd June

Bruton Town Walkabout and Museum Visit. This will be led by the local historian followed by a visit to the local museum .Travel by own transport. Meet at Bruton Museum in High Street at 7.00 pm.

Saturday all day 28th July

West Somerset Railway and Local Churches. Meet at the car park at Bishops Lydeard Station at 10.30 am. In the morning a visit to local churches led by Brian and Moira Gittos (Combe Florey and Bishops Lydeard). Break for lunch at one of the local pubs or own packed lunch. Afternoon trip on the West Somerset Railway. Return fare to Watchett is currently £10.50 for adults and £9.20 for Senior Citizens

Friday 5th October

Clare Randall, one of our star members will talk of the subject of “Blacksmithing in Somerset & Dorset” Her interest in this subject arises from the story of her father who was in fact a blacksmith.

Friday 2nd November

Wells Cathedral Records. Ann Crawford, who is the Archivist of Wells Cathedral will give a talk on the archival records of this, our local Cathedral and library collection.

Friday 7th December

Tales of Somerset Woolen Mills. Brian Canham will give a talk on a former local trade through the example of a well known mill in Wellington. He has recordings of former workers and a host of samples of the process from raw wool onwards.

Friday 4th January 2008

Members night. Your annual opportunity to address the Society on any subject you might wish to talk about. It would be nice to see a few new faces introducing new subjects to the Society.

Friday 1st February 2008

The Historic Landscape of the Quantock Hills. Hazel Riley, a well known archaeologist will give a talk on the subject of her work for English Heritage in the Quantock Hills, which culminated in the publication of her book, which is reviewed elsewhere in this newsletter. She is also the co-author on another highly recommended book "The Archaeology of Exmoor".

Friday 7th March 2008

Thimbles. Jenifer Gardner, one of our members will give a talk on this subject. She will display her collection of them. This should provide an interesting subject, especially for our lady members.

Friday 4th April

Richard Osgood, an MOD archaeologist will talk of his work on Salisbury Plain.

This will hopefully lead to a visit there next summer. It is quite something to walk up the remains of a Romano British village street still preserved in clearly discerned earthworks.

From the Treasurer

Subscriptions were due on the 1st January and if you have not already made a remittance it would be appreciated if it can be done. If members have a standing order, would you please check that it is for the correct amount. This will be the last newsletter sent to non subscribers.

Individual £ 6.50 Couples £ 9.50 Family £ 11.00

Junior/Student £1.00

Members Night January

Members Night produced three very different presentations. Firstly Maurice Tomlin talked about the derivation of local place names in a most detailed and humorous manner. Duncan Black then spoke about wartime Yeovil, shelters auxiliary fire stations etc. This was followed by Clare Randall who spoke of her planned study of burial practice in the Somerset and Dorset area.

Friday February 4th

This was one of our more unusual talks given by Mr. David Rivett a local undertaker. He gave a fascinating account, which ranged over the history of his profession and drew heavily on his own experiences. He explained that it was not until 1837 that it became law for burials to be registered and that in the early days of undertaking it was common for joiners and undertakers to work closely together even sharing the same premises. The first official cremation in this country took place in Woking in 1885. Bodies had been embalmed from ancient Egyptian times and this process had also proved very popular in the USA. During the 1970s and 80s it became common in this country as well, but that was no longer the case because of concern about diseases such as HIV and Hepatitis. Refrigeration is used for storage but enbalming is still used for bodies, which are sent overseas. Mr Rivett had been involved in some interesting local cases such as the discovery of between 100 and 150 coffins at the South Street Baptist Church in Yeovil, many of which were underneath the steps at the front of the building. It required a licence from the Home Office to deal with this. There was a curious distinction in law between certifying death for burial, which required only one doctor's signature and for cremation where two are needed. The profession had its hazardous side because there had been four cases in the town of the human form of mad cow disease, CJD. One of his most unusual assignments had been the funeral of a German SS officer, with appropriate military honours.

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WASHINGTON CAR AND CARRIAGES KEPT.

Friday March 2nd

An interesting talk on the subject of “very clever leather” or the story of present day Pittards. This talk was given by the sales director who explained how Pittards is at the hub of a worldwide trade in leather. They import skins from a number of countries around the world, even from the USA although there the habit of branding animals tends to devalue the hides. Pittards are not directly involved in the manufacture of any leather items being a supplier of specialist forms of leather to some thirty countries. They have built up a relationship with many of the brand leading names in the sport and fashion industries, which then specify the materials used to the local manufacturers. Where appropriate these manufacturers then order the appropriate materials from Pittards. One got the image of some worker in far away China using Pittards leather to make some sought after fashion or sports item. They produce leathers, which have special properties such as being waterproof or even fireproof. Examples of this are the gloves used by Formula One drivers, the fingers and palms of which are of fireproof leather, or the high class golf shoes, that are guaranteed waterproof for two years

Book Review

Castle Cary to Durston: The Story of a Railway

This book was edited by Somerton historian Nancy Langmaid with contributions from a number of individuals and history groups. It tells the story of the building of the new main line from Castle Cary to Durston in 1905-6 as part of the Great Western Railway's new shorter route from Paddington to the west country avoiding Bristol. It includes extensive illustrations with maps and diagrams and even the bill for the work in some detail. The entire job costing £317,686 18s 5p

This is an attractive book of localised interest. Softback, A4 size, of 148 pages. Cost £10

Life in the Charltons: The Station Years 1905-1962

This book was written by a local personality, Janet Baillie. This is another book marking the opening of the railway from Castle Cary to Durston, but with the viewpoint of Charlton Mackrell parish.

This book also contains a wealth of photographs, many of them previously unpublished together with many reminiscences from local people. This book is unusual in being published by the Charltons

Historical Society and is entirely produced within the parish. It is also produced to order using up to date computer techniques.

A lovely book of very localised interest. Softback, A4 size, spiral bound of 50 pages. Cost £5.00

The Historic Landscape of the Quantock Hill

This is a very professional book written by Hazel Riley and published by English Heritage. It covers the archaeology of this area of outstanding natural beauty from the second millennium to the industrial period. The area consists of wild upland heaths, oakwoods and agricultural areas. Everywhere there is archaeology of all sorts and periods. It includes stunning colour imagery and extensive air photos. This is an attractive and well researched hardback book of 186 pages at a price of £19.95

Building Protection

After the success of the listing of the Foundry House it is now unfortunately the task of reporting a failure. The Vice Chairman became aware that the Control Tower at Yeovilton was being replaced and it was the MOD's intention to demolish the existing control tower.

The issue was raised with English Heritage via the county archaeology department with a view to listing, but this proved unsuccessful. English Heritage declining to list it on the grounds that it had been significantly altered. Whilst this was correct, the alterations reflected the development of naval aviation from the Swordfish to the Sea Harrier era. This is surely an important part of modern history.

This building was built at the beginning of the second world war. It was one of only four such buildings of this type ever built . They were constructed at Crail and Arbroath in Scotland and at St Merryn in Cornwall and here at Yeovilton. The building at St Merryn was demolished several years ago. With the demolition of the tower at Yeovilton, no such building now exists in England. In Scotland, where Historic Scotland has a very different attitude, both the buildings there are listed.

The record of English Heritage with the treatment of airfields is distinctly odd. They have listed only two entire flying establishments to date. Firstly they have listed Calshot, a seaplane base and RAF Benson an entirely grass airfield. In short, not a single airfield with runways anywhere in England or Wales is listed.

Stop Press

At long last we have our own dedicated website. It is still under construction, but is available. It has membership application forms, which can be printed out for new members. They will still require the form plus monies to be sent to the treasurer. All the officers of the society will be available via email. Eventually Chronicle and the Newsletter will be available electronically. There are three useable addresses which can be used to access the website as shown below.

www.yalhs.org.uk

www.yeovilarchaeology.org.uk

www.yeovilhistory.org.uk

Archaeology in Somerset

Affairs at South Cadbury

2006 was a busy year for the project. A great deal of analysis work has been going on looking at finds, but the project has also been excavating again, looking at Late Iron Age features at Sigwells to further understand the development of the landscape and examining a large circular feature on Sheep Slait Common, which dates from the Bronze Age, apparently a ringwork that was reoccupied in the Middle Iron Age. Ongoing geophysics, test pits and excavation at Great Woolston has revealed a densely packed landscape with features dating from the early Bronze Age onwards, including Iron Age, Roman and Medieval sites that hint at surprising degrees of continuity. One of the two deserted medieval settlement sites has produced a very high status Purbeck Marble mortar, dated from about the 13th Century. The other settlement has produced hints of metal working from much earlier. More work will be carried out there later this year. A surviving map dated to 1725 indicates that the field layout and boundaries have remained virtually unchanged since that date and the field shapes hint at survival from much earlier times. The members of the project are looking forward to an exciting season this summer.

Editorial

James and Sally Gerrard have expressed a wish to be released from the heavy yoke of Newsletter Editors. I'm sure the whole society feel that we owe them a debt of gratitude for their dedication and hard work. This of course leaves a further vacancy in our management team. Anyone who wishes to take on this task will have the opportunity of volunteering at the Annual General Meeting on the 5th of May. The surviving members of the management team are producing this issue. I'm sure that the whole society looks forward to seeing James and Sally again in the not too distant future.