



Yeovil Archaeological and Local History Society

Patron: *Ian Martin, Mayor of Yeovil*

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Newsletter: James Gerrard

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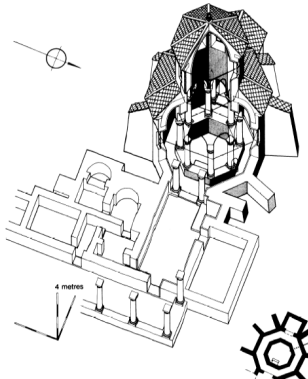
Email: yeovilarchaeology@yahoo.co.uk

Web: www.yalhs.org.uk

Newsletter

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Editorial

The first half of 2009 has been busy for the Society. Maurice Tomlin has stepped up to the mark and taken on the Chairmanship after Duncan's sudden passing. Maurice promises a new direction for the Society and we wait to see how things will develop.

We also managed to complete the long anticipated geophysical survey of the Roman villa at Lufton. At the time of writing we are still awaiting a full technical report from Liz Caldwell but the project was a great success and a fuller description can be found elsewhere in the *Newsletter*.

Finally, I am reminded in writing this Newsletter of my words to the Society's AGM in 2008. At that meeting I pointed out that the *Newsletter* would only survive if the membership provided copy for it. At a vote the members present argued for the continued production of the *Newsletter* in its current format. This will not happen unless *you* provide the copy. I will write nothing for the January *Newsletter* so if you want a *Newsletter* its pages will be blank unless the members contribute to it.

If you have any thoughts on the issues raised above please feel free to contact us: emails can be sent to: jamesgerrard2003@yahoo.co.uk. Any attachments as Microsoft Word (.DOC) or TEXT (.TXT) files please.

James

New Members

Welcome to: P & H Fowler, L P Card, R Keyse, J Thurlow, E Caswell.

Programme 2009

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)

Meetings

Summer Visits

June Own transport *trip to Dartmoor* with an expert guide is planned. The committee would like expressions of interest from the membership. If you're interested please contact Brian Gittos

July Own transport trip to *Martock* to view the church and treasurer's house. If you're interested please contact Brian Gittos

2nd October Sue Jones on **The Evidence for cannibalism in the West Country**

6th November Chris Webster on **Saxon and Norman Somerset**

5th December Jerry Sampson on **Church Archaeology**

January **Members' Evening**

Yeovil: the hidden history

The Society's publication – *Yeovil: the hidden history* – is available at a substantially reduced rate of £9.95 from Brian Gittos. All proceeds go to the Society and at 160 pages, including colour plates this handsome volume is a real bargain!

The Lufton Villa Project

Over the weekend of the 20-23rd March the geophysical survey of the Lufton Roman Villa was undertaken by a combination of YALHS and SCEP members. The weather was ridiculously fine (I returned to the office with a tan that lead to me being asked if I'd flown to Rome for the weekend!) and a large area was surveyed with a resistance meter and a Bartington fluxgate gradiometer. The results of the survey will be published in full in the autumn's edition of *Chronicle* but some preliminary thoughts are given here.

The survey proves that the villa buildings as excavated by Hayward in the 1950s and 1960s survive and individual rooms can be discerned on the resistance plot. The gradiometry confirms the position of the villa as a very magnetically 'noisy' area – this is due to the previous excavations disturbing the ground and the large amount of fired tiles used in the hypocaust systems.





Beyond the villa the gradiometry detected a large number of linear anomalies. These are probably ditched fields and boundaries. There appear to be two phases. The first shares the villa's alignment (and is probably Roman) and a second, undated, arrangement at a different angle. Interestingly, we failed to detect any trace of the supposed road seen by Mick Aston on an aerial photograph connecting the site to the Ilchester to Dorchester Roman road.

The survey is one of the largest archaeological interventions in the Yeovil area and marks the Society's return to active fieldwork. It is to be hoped that we can build on this success and that future work at this site and others with SCEP will yield substantial dividends.

My thanks go to everyone who took part: Liz Caldwell, Brian Cann, Edward Caswell, Tony Dickinson, Andy Dutch, James Gerrard, Brian Gittos, Doug Gurzynski, Nigel Harvey, Matt Law, Roger Keyse, Geraldine Mabey, Neil Tinkley, Elaine Taylor, Maurice Tomlin, Ken Mycock and Pete Wright. Special mention should be made of the help given by the landowners, James and Carol Pullen, who gave us permission to undertake the survey and showed such interest in the work.

James Gerrard

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 Couples £9.50 Family £11
Junior/Student £1

GIFT AID SCHEME

This enables tax to be reclaimed on all donations to a charity. Therefore it is now possible for the Society to obtain currently 28p in the £ tax refund on any donation to the Society including annual subscriptions if members are tax payers and sign a Gift Aid Declaration. An amount of tax equivalent to the amount to be claimed must already have been paid to the Inland Revenue. This would provide the Society with a considerable increase in its income without incurring any extra expense to members or to the Society. For any members not already participating in this scheme and would like to do so please contact the Treasurer for the relevant form.

Hinton St Mary - Again

Those of us who have been members of the society for a few years may remember Les and Jean Card's account of the discovery of the famous mosaic at Hinton St Mary in *Chronicle* 8(2). The pavement - depicting a clean shaven figure with a Chi-Rho behind his head - has usually been interpreted as one of the earliest pictures of Christ. However, an alternative camp has argued that the figure might actually be intended to be the first Christian emperor Constantine the Great. This argument has resurfaced in the most recent volume of *Britannia* showing that some arguments just go round and round. For more info: S. Pearce 2008 'The Hinton St Mary Mosaic Pavement: Christ or Emperor?' *Britannia* 39, 193-218

The Anglo-Saxon Origins of West Coker Parish Church

Some years ago, we discovered important Anglo-Saxon fabric in St. Michael's church East Coker, which we reported in *Chronicle* and Proc. SANHS. The purpose of this note is to suggest that Anglo-Saxon work may also survived at the neighbouring church of St Martin of Tours, West Coker. It is true that most of the present building derives from major restoration/re-building carried out in two campaigns in the 19th century (in 1834 and again in 1863/4). However, the tower was not involved in the 19th century re-building because it had already received attention in the previous century. When viewed from the south west, it shows similar features to the tower of East Coker church which was built in 1791, with its closely jointed ashlar masonry and some of the windows having simple Y-shaped tracery. This is confirmed by a entry in the church guide which says that "Until 1765 the tower was low and thatched.". Presumably this was the date of its rebuilding.

So, what grounds are there for claiming Anglo-Saxon fabric at West Coker? Well, all is not what it seems and when you walk round to the north side of the tower, its character changes markedly. Up the level of the ringing chamber, the tower wall is rendered and not fine ashlar and in the angle between the tower wall and the north aisle is a truly remarkable stair turret. It reaches to the level of the ringing chamber and is also rendered with three small slit windows and a tiled roof. What is particularly noticeable about it is the irregularity of its shape. It is tapered, being broader at the base than at the top and changes cross section from something resembling a horse-shoe section at the base to almost semi-circular at the top. Clearly this stair turret and probably much of the wall it is attached to belong to the pre-1765 tower. Being on the less visible north side, the 18th century re-builders presumably opted to retain these features and thereby save money.

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Another item in the church guide, increases the interest this enigmatic stair turret, apparently two of its windows are ‘glazed’ with animal horn. When thinned down, this material is translucent and will permit light to pass through it, although it would not be possible to see out through such a widow. This extremely unusual feature is also mentioned in passing in the entry on West Coker church, in the *South and West Somerset* volume of Pevsner’s *The Buildings of England* series.

In conclusion, we do believe there is a possibility that it may go back to the late Saxon period. In our opinion, a rendered wall, tapering upwards, built in an irregular way, with horn windows are all pointing in this direction. We have not been able to examine it internally and this might reveal important evidence for or against an early date. We would be interested to hear from any YALHS members who may have come across surviving horn windows elsewhere, including other buildings such as castles and houses. B & M Gittos

The Green Room’s cellar

Some of you may already have enjoyed the Green Room Restaurant’s fine food. Located on Wine Street the restaurant used to be the Hole in the Wall Public House and the old pub’s beer cellar has been refurbished as a function room. As we all know, Yeovil hides its historic origins well but the cellar is a little hidden historic gem. The ceiling is vaulted and made from handmade (and I think unfrogged) bricks and supported by simple hamstone columns of Classical inspiration. The restaurant’s promotional literature suggests that it’s fifteenth- or sixteenth-century in date but I doubt it is so early. An eighteenth-century or early nineteenth-century date might be more appropriate. Either way it’s a lovely and interesting place to have a meal and a bottle of wine and you’re all encouraged to visit! Reservations can be made on 01935 470150 or eat@thegreenroominyeovil.co.uk, www.thegreenroominyeovil.co.uk

James Gerrard