



# East Dorset Antiquarian Society

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**NEWSLETTER - DECEMBER 2007**

We wish all our members and their families a VERY Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year



**\*\* There will be mince pies available at the Christmas Meeting \*\***

## **Recent Events**

### **Last EDAS Lecture**

The planned speaker for our lecture was Peter Sommer, who was going to speak to us on Alexander the Great. Unfortunately, he was called away on business at short notice. Andy Russel of the Southampton Archaeology Unit very kindly agreed to step in at short notice and present his talk on the recent excavations at Greyfriars in Southampton. After such a generous gesture, it would be hoped that everything else went as smoothly as clockwork. Unfortunately, when we all arrived at the Hall it was still locked (this has only happened once before in about 20 years!). Peter Walker managed to rescue the key, but we all ended up standing for about 35 minutes outside on a frosty night. Andy's problem's weren't over, however, as despite bringing a tried and tested computer and projector that he has used many times before, the technical might of all those in the room was incapable of making the projector work. Despite this, Andy gave us a slide-show based only on the computer screen itself. The Southampton area is very rich in archaeological remains, but most of it is hidden under development. Some had been revealed in the war by Luftwaffe bombing, including new parts of the medieval Priory which Andy had been investigating recently. This became a very wealthy establishment after it appealed to the Pope and obtained permission to bury the dead of Southampton in its own graveyard, much to the annoyance of the local Parishes. Other examples he gave of intriguing finds were a mass burial pit of medieval individuals who showed the signs of a very hard life, such as skeletal deformity due to work, and limbs broken from industrial accidents. Another example of a high status find were mediaeval floor tiles (usually stolen as soon as a Priory was closed), and spectacular embroidery that was unusually preserved. This was because the threads contained silver and gold, and this stopped moths and rats eating it.

Despite every obstacle being thrown in his way, Andy kept his composure and gave us a very interesting and well presented lecture. We thank him very much for his talk, and his unlimited patience!

### **Sunday 7 October Walk around Portland**

11 members and 3 friends joined Keith Childs for walk around historic Portland. We started by visiting the Portland Museum in Easton where we saw many local artefacts, which had been found over the years. In 1930 Marie Stopes gave the cottage in which the museum is situated. We then walked a short distance to Rufus Castle, also known as Bow and Arrow Castle. This stands on a large rocky outcrop. A castle here is mentioned as early as 1142. What stands today is an irregular pentagon and dates to the late 15<sup>th</sup> century. It is sited above Church Ope Cove, the only beach on the east side of Portland. Down a steep flight of steps below the castle we saw the ruins of St Andrew's church which dates from the 12<sup>th</sup> century. It was abandoned in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century because landslips had made it unsafe. We then climbed back up the cliff track to view Pennsylvania Castle built in 1800 by James Wyatt for John Penn, the Governor of Portland. John Penn was the grandson of the founder of the State of Pennsylvania. It is just a residence but has been called 'castle' because Wyatt adorned it with battlements. After making our way past Portland stone quarries we viewed the remains of two early 18<sup>th</sup> century windmills. These still stand to their full height but are minus their sails and internal machinery.

After lunch, we moved to Portland Heights, the highest point on Portland, where we had spectacular views and then walked to the Verne Citadel. This was built in 1860-72 on a 50 acre site as a fort to

house 1,000 troops and is now a prison. The Citadel's defences are impressive with deep stone-lined ditches up to 120ft wide and 70ft deep. Further on, we saw the remains of the artillery batteries that had guarded the coast in the Victorian period. There was also a Second World War anti-aircraft battery and to bring us up nearly to the present there were some innocuous buildings surrounded by security fencing. They stand above a vast underground tunnel system, about 100 feet deep, including large rooms cut out of the rock. Some rumours say this is the place where local authority and military staff would have retreated to survive a nuclear attack on Britain whilst the rest of us fried on the surface. Other stories tell of vast radar installations set up in the early 1950s as part of Britain's Cold War defences.

We thank Keith for a very informative walk and look forward to him leading more walks in the future.

Peter Walker

### **Forthcoming Events**

#### **Dartmoor Field Trip 8 June to 13 June 2008**

Planning for this is now well under way although the specific programme is not yet finalised. There will be several walks of varying lengths to take in most of the more spectacular prehistoric sites such as Grimspound and Merrivale and we will be investigating some of the industrial history of the moor.

We will be having a guided walk led by a 'proper' archaeologist visiting BA field systems and settlements, a DMV and possibly a gunpowder factory. There will even be a visit to Dartmoor prison (which may or may not be familiar to some members!). Other, as yet unconfirmed, visits might include Exeter, Kent's cavern and Dartmouth.

Several members have indicated that they will be coming on the trip and it would be helpful if all those who are definitely coming could contact me, **at the latest, by the end of January**. I will need names, addresses, mobile phone numbers and preferably email addresses. Also, as in previous years, I will require a non-refundable deposit of £5.00 per person (cash or cheque payable to B. Maynard). This is used for payments towards guided tours, entrance fees etc.

It is up to individual trippers to make their own arrangements for accommodation. I suggest that we base ourselves in and around Moretonhampstead where there are plenty of B&B's, guesthouses, hotels, self catering and campsites.

So, any members wanting to join us please contact me either at the meetings, by email at [brian.retired@ntlworld.com](mailto:brian.retired@ntlworld.com), by phone on 01202 677707 or by snail mail at 7, Verity Crescent, Poole BH17 8TH.

Brian Maynard

### **DATES FOR YOUR DIARY**

The dates for EDAS events are underlined. The monthly evening lectures start at 7.30pm. Walks and field visits usually meet at 10.30 am at the published Grid Reference. Ring the leader if the weather is doubtful or if more details are required.

#### **2007**

Wed 12 Dec EDAS Lecture: **The whole is the sum of the parts: naming the parts** with Bob Hill of The Historic Building Advisory Service.

#### **2008**

Wed 9 Jan EDAS Lecture. We hope that this will be the talk postponed from November: **In the Footsteps of Alexander The Great** with Peter Sommer, archaeologist, writer and documentary producer. **\*\* To be confirmed \*\***

Wed 13 Feb EDAS Lecture: **The life and times of the Mary Rose 1509-1545** with Bill Moore of the Mary Rose Information Group. Bill will be dressed in Tudor Period Costume.

Wed 12 Mar EDAS Lecture: **"Dorset's first Railway"** with Peter Sills, chairman of the Purbeck Mineral and Mining Museum Group