



# East Dorset Antiquarian Society

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**NEWSLETTER - FEBRUARY 2011**

## **Recent Events**

**Our last Lecture was "Rockbourne Roman Villa: its History, Excavation and Conservation"** with David Allen, Senior Keeper of Archaeology, Hampshire County Museums & Archives Service. The Rockborne Site was discovered in 1942, when tesserae and oyster shells from an animal hole were found. A small test pit revealed a mosaic pavement, and Morley-Hewitt bought the piece of land containing the Villa to safeguard it. However, owing to the war, proper excavation didn't start until 1956. There was a more comprehensive excavation in 1960, and then yearly summer excavations followed over about 20 years. These showed that there had originally been a Round House there, followed by a Cottage, then a Corridor Range and Courtyard, and finally a Bath House had been added. Therefore, the site ranges from early prehistoric to the late Roman period.

The Villa stands close to a (putative?) Roman Road, and two 'milestones' were found. However, these did not signal mileages to places, but seemed to be tributes to a person named 'Decius', and (a tribe?) the 'Tretici'. The Villa boasted many mosaics which are from the 'Dorset School', but were all of very simple design. Significant finds were a prehistoric skeleton of an individual with a withered leg, who had also had a trepanation of the skull. Modern experts have said that the individual lived for some ten years after the operation took place.

A number of Coin Hoards were found, and these were stored by the archaeologists themselves. David was sure that the excavations were undertaken in an 'old fashioned way'. The recording was very inadequate, and of the many thousands of coins that were found, at the end of the dig only a very small fraction were still left preserved.

Coming right up to date, David's team is undergoing quite severe cuts to its archaeology budget, and up to 20% of the team might lose their jobs. Rockborne Roman Villa is not open to visitors at the moment. However, David has suggested that he would be happy to take EDAS on a guided tour around the Villa, and we might also be able to go into the museum. The Committee will discuss this very soon and we will let you know if we can arrange a trip.

We thank David very much for giving us a very interesting lecture on the Villa, and also the context of the site, and what was happening in southern England when settled Roman occupation started.

## **The March 2011 Meeting.**

Just a reminder that our March meeting is on the **third** Wednesday of the month (i.e. 16<sup>th</sup>), **not the second one**. The church won't allow us to hold our meeting on the second Wednesday as it is Ash Wednesday.

## **EDAS AGM 2011 – Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> March.**

In the December Newsletter we included the details of the current EDAS Committee. Every year all Officers must step down for re-election. Della is stepping down as Membership Secretary, and Helen Brickell has a nomination as her replacement. Two of the Ordinary members must also step down. This year they are Graham Adams and Brian Maynard, and both are willing to stand for re-election.

In order to speed the business of the AGM itself, members are invited to send their questions to the committee beforehand:

To: John and Della Day, 2, Wigbeth Cottages,  
Horton, Wimborne, Dorset, BH21 7JJ  
or e-mail to: [john.della@btinternet.com](mailto:john.della@btinternet.com)

## THE HINTON ST MARY MOSAIC

Roger Peers' Christmas card to John and Della Day was accompanied by the following article, for which we are very grateful and thank him.

"In September and October 1963 the Dorset Natural History and Archaeology Society excavated two large mid-4<sup>th</sup> Century Roman Mosaic pavements at Hinton St. Mary, North Dorset. One of the mosaics had this roundel in the centre. It is the only significant excavation I have directed.

Papal Liturgies: Magnificat

Magnificat



The head, with the Greek Chi-Rho monogram behind it, is the earliest representation of Christ on a floor so far found in the whole Roman world. (Professor Jocelyn Toynbee, *The Christian Mosaic, Hinton St. Mary*, Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society, volume 85, pages 116 – 121.) Mr John White, blacksmith of Hinton St. Mary, hit upon the edge of the first, pagan, pavement while digging a post-hole for a shelter for his daughter's pony.

Fortunately, Mr White had served in the RAF in Libya in the 1939-1945 World War, and had seen Roman mosaic pavements there. He telephoned me on Friday 13<sup>th</sup> September 1963. It was a fine, dry autumn and we had time to uncover the pavements, and record them, before bedding them down for the winter. Subsequently, the British Museum purchased them. This year (2010 when this article was written) Neil MacGregor D.M., the current Director of the British Museum, used the roundel as the 44<sup>th</sup> object in the BBC Radio 4 series "A History of the World in One Hundred Objects".

### 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.

**2011**

Fri 4 Feb

**Martin Green: "Cursus Country"**. Dorset County Museum at 7:30pm.

Wed 9 Feb

EDAS Lecture: "**Collapsing time: the strange tale of the Salisbury Hoard**" with Ben Roberts, Curator, European Bronze Age, The British Museum.

**Wed 16 Mar**

**EDAS AGM**, followed by Lecture: "**Novgorod the Great: The spectacular archaeology of a medieval Russian city**" with Mark Brisbane of Bournemouth University.

Fri 1 Apr

**Lilian Ladle: "Worth Matravers: Buildings and Burials, Rituals and Rubbish"**. Dorset County Museum at 7:30pm.