



East Dorset Antiquarian Society

www.dorset-archaeology.org.uk

mail@dorset-archaeology.org.uk

Edited by: Andrew Morgan, email: andrewmorgz@aol.com, tel: 01202 731162

NEWSLETTER – October 2012

Change to Programme

Due to circumstances entirely outside his control we are sorry to announce that Tim Schadla-Hall has been whisked prematurely off to Hokkaido by the Japanese and cannot join us on Wednesday.

We are very grateful to Dr Charles Rees who has kindly rescheduled his talk on Richard III. Of course this is very topical with the recent excavation of human remains in Leicester and claims that they are the king himself. This will be a very interesting talk and Charles will consider:

1. Richard the reluctant king
2. Revelations for Bosworth 1485.

We offer Charles our sincere thanks for jumping into the breach at short notice. And we look forward to Tim's safe return and the David Johnson Memorial Lecture which will now be held in January.

EDAS LECTURE: The Chiseldon Cauldrons, with Professor Andrew Fitzpatrick, Wessex Archaeology

For our September lecture Andrew Fitzpatrick explained the excavation of the Chiseldon Cauldrons. They comprise 13 Iron Age vessels made of an iron rim and handles, with a thin copper alloy base beaten by cold working to an incredible 1/10 mm thickness. They are approximately 50-60cm wide and 40cm deep. The assemblage is unique and very important. Andrew explained that their excavation and preservation is due to the dedication, inspiration and determination of a handful of people working against the system.

It all started in 2004 with Peter Hyams a metal detectorist who responding to a strong signal, dug into the ground and found the top of a large metal object. It appeared to be iron and quite fragile. Further investigation suggested there may be more objects within a small pit. He realised he needed help and first contacted a local archaeologist and the Chiseldon Local History Group but soon made contact with Katie Hinds of the Wiltshire Portable Antiquities Scheme. They opened a small trench but realised it was inadequate to remove the fragile contents. It appeared there were at least three cauldrons and concluded they were probably medieval. There was a lot of local interest but no resources to undertake the excavation. They agreed to cover the trench and protect the site. But Peter was undeterred and took a sample of the thin metal to Dr Peter Northover of Oxford University, and after analysis he confirmed it was copper alloy, of a type used in the south west during the Iron Age. This was critical, because under the Treasure Act the objects could now be regarded as treasure.

Wessex Archaeology volunteered resources for a few days. Starting on the basis of a small find they soon realised that they had underestimated the challenge and had to massively increase the excavation and utilise a JCB digger to uncover the extent of the pit. Now aided by the British Museum conservator Alex Baldwin, they eventually found 13 cauldrons, all fragile and a few incomplete. Each was filled and held together by soil. They had to be stabilised by applying layers of plaster of Paris, until they resembled a collection of oven-ready turkeys. They were each quite heavy. The only other finds within the pit were two ox skulls. The pit was quite shallow and appears to have been lined with a wicker material.

Andrew went on to describe the limitations of the Treasure Act; it provides a valuation of the finds but no funds for professional archaeology services. Much to the chagrin of Peter Hyams the finds were valued at a few hundred pounds. The conservation work has been funded from National Lottery grant based on two conservation experts for two years.

The cauldrons have been used over a long period and have been repeatedly repaired. There are traces of fat, and appear to have been used to cook stews. In the UK about 20 cauldrons have been found but most have been deposited in water which makes Chiseldon even more special.

As usual we can only speculate on the story of the cauldrons. We know that the Chiseldon site sits on a slight rise in a flat featureless landscape situated between two hill forts; Liddington an early IA fort and Barbury Castle a more complex site still being used in late IA. We know that the sacrifice of animals and feasting is very important in Iron Age societies. A collection of 13 cauldrons, not forgetting the two ox skulls, would feed a large number of people. So was there a final celebratory feast for the tribe and why were the cauldrons buried and left? We can only await the results of further analysis.

We thank Andrew for returning to EDAS with another fascinating lecture. We congratulate Peter for his perseverance and Wessex Archaeology for making resources available for this important excavation.

Andrew Morgan

EDAS ARCHAEOLOGY- Druce Farm Roman Villa Excavation

Many thanks to those volunteers who have been excavating at Druce Farm during the past 3 weeks. Our initial estimate of 2-3 weeks was optimistic and was always dependent on what was uncovered. We have found evidence of walls, ditches and much building debris. Because of what has been found and what further exploration we need to carry out, it has been decided we will need probably another three weeks to complete our investigation.

So, if you want an opportunity to dig please give Lilian Ladle a call on 01929 553144 or email her at bestwall@tiscali.co.uk. To those of you who have already been excavating please do come again. Digging hours are Monday to Friday 10.00 to 16.00

Peter Walker

PRIEST'S HOUSE MUSEUM UPDATE

The team of archaeology volunteers have been working hard on the finds recovered from the excavation in the Museum garden last year. It has been slow but steady progress, mainly because of the large number of finds that were recovered but at last the initial recording stage has been completed. They have had well over 52,500 finds to process. This number includes over 30,000 pieces of identifiable pieces of bone, ranging in size from rat mandibles to a horse skull. There are nearly 8,000 pieces of pottery which date from the medieval period up to 20th century, 2,500 metal objects of all shapes and sizes and 3,500 pieces of glass – including old window glass and lots of bottle fragments and I cannot forget the oyster shells – there are over 56 kilos of these. The various specialist reports will be worked on over the winter months and by the Spring we will have a clearer picture of how the garden area has been used over time.

At the same time as processing the finds the volunteers have also been involved with the more urgent job of transferring the archaeological collections of the Museum from their temporary storage facilities and organising them into their permanent home in the new building.

In September on behalf of EDAS I attended the opening of a temporary exhibition at the Museum. In the continuing spirit of the Olympic Games the exhibition called "Back of the Net" highlights East Dorset's Sporting Heritage. Amongst other displays the exhibition features the first Britain to win an Olympic track and field event at the 1900 Paris games, Charles Bennett who lived at Shapwick. For all football fans there is also a display of memorabilia from Wimborne Town Football Club's success at Wembley in 1992 when they won the F A Vase Trophy against Guiseley. We were also lucky to be able to meet Ian Kennedy, a coach with Wimborne Athletic Club and one of this year's Olympic Torch Bearers who brought with him his Olympic torch. The exhibition was opened by Councillor John Burden and will run until the Museum closes at the end of October.

Gill Broadbent

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

DATE	EDAS EVENTS – 2012
Wed 10th October	EDAS Lecture: “Richard III the reluctant king plus revelations from Bosworth 1485”, with Dr Charles Rees.
Wed 14th November	EDAS Lecture: “The Lands of the Queen of Sheba – Myth, History and Endemics” Ian Lewis
Wed 12th December	EDAS Lecture: “Were the Romans like us”, with Geoff Taylor
DATE	EDAS EVENTS – 2013
Wed 9th January 2013	The David Johnson Memorial Lecture, with Tim Schadla-Hall