



Established 1983

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 – February 2014

EDAS Annual General Meeting

This year our AGM will be held on 12th March and we hope you will be able to attend.

We have taken the opportunity to review and modify our Constitution, to describe better what the society does and how it is run, and we are delighted that Geoff Taylor has been able to convert it into plain English. At the AGM we will be asking members to vote on the new version. A copy of the new and old Constitutions will be sent to you shortly, along with the Agenda, and the usual Officer Reports.

If you are interested in standing as a General Committee Member please complete the Nomination Form (see end of Newsletter) and return it to our Secretary Brian Maynard by 19th February. If you require further information please contact Brian on Tel: 01202 677707, email: brian.retired@ntworld.com

The AGM will be followed by a talk by Committee Member Dave Stewart about his impressive work on Hod Hill.

With the details of the 2014 Field Trip being finalised (see article below) we are now considering arrangements for the 2015 Field Trip, so please come forward if you have any ideas.

Peter Walker is finalising a programme of walks for the summer and this will be published in the next Newsletter.

STOP PRESS

We have just received an apology from Martin Brown, Principal Archaeologist, who cannot deliver his talk on Burial Mounds and Battletanks, Archaeology of MOD Estates, on the 12th February, due to a new work commitment. He extends his sincere apologies and will be rescheduled as soon as possible.

Lilian Ladle has stepped into the breach and will give a talk on "Augustus Moore, Wareham's disgraced Tobacco pipe maker". It is an interesting story and involves a dig involving several EDAS members.

EDAS Lecture – Pre-Columbian Mayan Culture, with Neil Meldrum

On a cold and wet January evening EDAS Member Neil Meldrum transported us to the tropical forest of the Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico and introduced us to the bloody world of the Mayans. Neil has had a lifelong interest in the civilisations of Mesoamerica, inspired by Sir John Eric Sidney Thompson who was an adventurer who became a leading archaeologist on Mesoamerica. Neil has visited the area four times and will return to Belize in July, when he will work on an excavation being organised by the University of Washington.

Neil said that most people know of the Aztecs who were destroyed by the Spanish marauders under Hernán Cortés de Monroy y Pizarro - a ruthless combination of steel, germs (see Fig-5) and native Indian allies- but there were a succession of civilisations before. He reminded us that Homo sapiens came out of Africa c. 120,000 years ago, and that they survived a near collapse of their population c. 70-60,000 years ago. By

40,000 years ago modern man had settled most of the known world bar the Americas; the land route was initially blocked by the great northern ice cap. But by 25,000 years ago they had crossed the land of Beringia which bridged the Bering Strait and followed ice free corridors into Northern America; reaching Tierra del Fuego by 10,000 years ago.

The archaeologists have divided the Mesoamerican record into 5 periods: Palaeo-Indian (10,000–3500BC), Archaic (3500–1800BC), Pre-Classic/ Formative (1800BC–AD250), Classic (AD 200–900), Post Classic (AD900–1519), the final fateful date records the start of the Spanish conquest. Neil explained that a succession of distinct civilisations flourished then collapsed. The reason for these cycles is still speculative but environmental failure, both natural and manmade, seems to be an important factor.

The first significant culture is that of the Olmecs (c.1500-600BC), who occupied an area in the tropical lowlands of south-central Mexico, centred on a river basin with well watered and fertile alluvial soil, in present day states of Vera Cruz and Tabasco. Here they created probably four city states: San Lorenzo, La Venta, Tres Zapotes and Laguna de los Cerros. They are the first group that show clear signs of religion and social hierarchy with priests and aristocracy. They developed large religious and ceremonial centres with temple mounds (see Fig-2), monumental sculptures, altars, and their settlements benefited from complex systems of drains and lagoons. A particular symbol of their era are huge carved heads (see Fig-1), some two to three metres tall, with seemingly African features. They had a mixed diet that included maize (Neil explained that the domestic version of maize took up to four thousand years to be fully developed).



Fig-1: Olmec colossal head monument



Fig-2: The Great Pyramid at La Venta (c. 500BC)

The reason for their collapse is not known, but environmental changes are possible. They left a strong legacy and heavily influenced the civilisations that succeeded them. Their demise roughly coincides with the start of the Mayan empire starting in El Mirador which grew to eventually support between 100,000 to 200,000 people, covering an area of 15sqkms. Another centre is at Nakbe located 70 kms away. Both areas have now been reclaimed by the jungle.

The Mayan classical period is between AD250-800, when there existed a number of autonomous city states: Caracol, Tikal, Palenque, Copán, Xunantunich and Calakmul. Neil suggested this compares with the Greek city states. Their area comprised three zones: the southern Pacific lowlands, the highlands, and the northern lowlands. The Mayan population numbered in the millions, they built monumental palaces and temples, developed the only fully developed written language of Mesoamerica, and are renowned for their art (see Fig-4), architecture, and mathematical and astronomical systems. Their most notable monuments are the stepped pyramids (see Fig-3) they built in their religious centres, as tombs and places of ritual, and the accompanying palaces for their rulers. They rebuilt over existing structures, continually increasing the height of buildings. Other important archaeological remains include the carved stone slabs called stela, which depict rulers, along with hieroglyphic texts describing their genealogy, military victories, and other accomplishments.



Fig-3: Pyramid at El Mirador



Fig-4: Presentation of captives to a Maya ruler, c. AD 785

The Maya civilization participated in long distance trade with many of the other Mesoamerican cultures, including Teotihuacan (with a population estimated at 250,000), the Zapotec, and other groups in central and gulf-coast Mexico. In addition, they traded with more distant, non-Mesoamerican groups.

They built in stone and covered external walls in stucco, which they painted with red ochre. But they did not have the arch, so they were dependent on thick walls and lintels to breach openings and corbel structures. They also constructed structures that have been interpreted as ball-courts. The Mayan empire first started to collapse in 800-1000AD, again environmental degradation is the likely cause due to massive deforestation, resulting in political instability and possible disease. Certainly environmental records show that the climate changed in 9th century with drier, cooler conditions. Neil explained that the Mayans were very conservative and resisted change. Many cities collapsed within a 30 year period. By AD 1000 very little remained in the lowlands and their centre moved to the north of Yucatan in the cities of Chichen Itza, Uxmal, Edzná, and Coba which continued through to the Spanish conquest, being finally subdued by the Spanish in 1697.

Neil also introduced us to the Aztecs. This group first appears in 1315, migrating from the north. They built the city of Tenochtitlan (c. 1450), upon raised islets in Lake Texcoco, which is now the site of Mexico City. This was the largest city in the world with a population of over 250,000 people. Apparently the Aztecs were an affiliation of peoples sharing the same language, Nahuatl which is still spoken today by 1.5 million Mexicans.

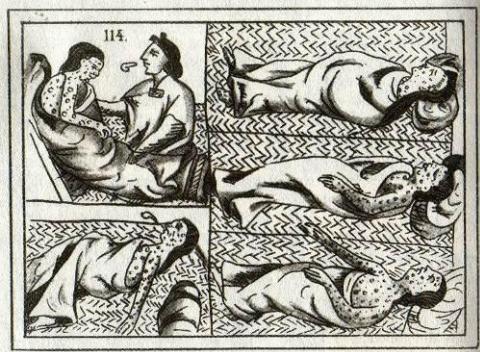


Fig-5: Sixteenth-century drawings of Aztec victims of smallpox.

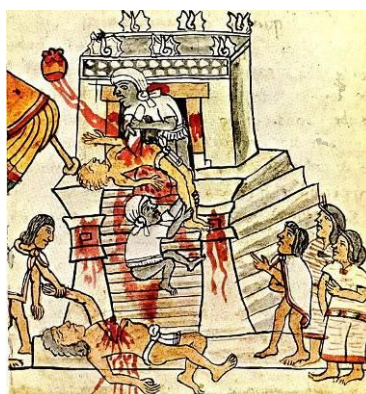


Fig-6: Human sacrifice as shown in the Codex Magliabechiano

Throughout the story of these sophisticated civilisations it has to be remembered that they did not enjoy some of the developments that characterised other civilisations: they relied basically on stone age technology, with little use of metallurgy, they did not have draught animals, nor had they developed the wheel or the arch.

Neil then attempted to explain the complexities of blood-letting and human sacrifice. First he said that it was a long held custom in the region, it was an offering to the Gods, the ultimate gift. The Mayans offered

their own blood; blood-letting was performed by piercing a soft body part, generally the tongue or penis, using obsidian blades, stingray spines, or a rope with attached thorns would be pulled through the tongue or earlobes. Whilst the Aztecs sensibly offered the blood of their captives (see Fig-6): the Spanish reported (and probably exaggerated) an occasion when 80,000 captives were ritually slaughtered! Neil suggested that even here the practise is not quite so abhorrent. He explained that the Spaniards would kill in battle and whenever they needed to induce terror, whereas the Aztecs fought battles to capture their enemy so that they could be used in a considered ritual sacrifice to their Gods. The Spaniards used this as propaganda to excuse their destruction of these complex and sophisticated Mesoamerican civilisations.

We thank Neil for introducing us to this fabulous and complex area and we look forward to a report on his adventures in Belize later in the summer.

Andrew Morgan

EDAS Field Trip 2014: To Lincolnshire between 8th to 13th June 2014

Arrangements for this year's field trip are coming together and it promises to be a full and interesting week. As Lincolnshire is such a huge county I have decided to confine our expedition to an area vaguely south and east of Lincoln.

The most convenient area for members to be based is around Horncastle or Woodhall Spa. These are both attractive and interesting places in their own right and offer quite a substantial range of accommodation options. The Maynards are staying at Greetham Lodge, near Horncastle, in our caravan. It also offers self-catering accommodation which looks very nice. I have lots of other accommodation information but most of it can be found easily on the internet.

Some final tinkering will be required but this is the programme so far:

Note – precise meeting times, grid references etc. will be forthcoming when I have figured them out for myself!

Sunday 8 June

Spend a relaxing morning doing your own thing in Louth, the 'capital of the Wolds'. Amongst other claims to fame it boasts the church with the highest steeple of any medieval church in England and is the most northerly town in the **world** sited on the Greenwich Meridian (wow!). Voted as 'Britain's best market town' by BBC countryfile it holds plenty of interest along with lots of independent shops and the all important eateries.

After lunch we shall meet up for a gentle stroll of 4 ¼ miles around Hubbard's Hills in the lovely Lincolnshire Wolds. This will prove that Lincolnshire is not as flat as some may think. Indeed there are places literally dozens of feet above sea level!

Monday 9 June

Morning visit to RAF Coningsby to see the Battle of Britain memorial flight with guided tour. Followed by a visit to Tattershall castle (NT). This is one of the earliest (15C) brick built castles in England. Lunch at castle or picnic.

Afternoon visit to Old Bolingbroke castle with the option of another short gentle stroll (4 ¼ miles again!)

Evening dinner and lecture by David Start, a noted expert on Lincolnshire heritage

Tuesday 10 June

We are privileged to enjoy a gentle all-day walk with David who will lead us around the monastic sites of the Witham valley. Hopefully David will explain the extraordinary number of these sites in such a small area.

Wednesday 11 June

Free day

Thursday 12 June

This will be a real mixed bag, (that is a coded message meaning I haven't sorted it out yet!)

Visits will include:

- Sempringham church (which will have a special resonance to those who were on the Snowdonia trip)
- Heckington windmill
- Ancaster church and exhibition
- Temple Bruer – a truly outstanding and rare surviving example of a Templar building

Friday 13 June

Our week will conclude with a day in the glorious city of Lincoln. We will try to fit in the following:

- The 'Collection' - an outstanding museum.
- A guided visit to the Posterngate Roman site (hopefully)
- A guided walking tour of medieval Lincoln followed by lunch in the city
- The magnificent Cathedral with our own guided tour
- Possibly visit Lincoln castle (currently undergoing major restoration works)

Then, as tradition demands, the last supper.

I hope that you can come along this year. A number of members have already expressed an interest but I need to know definite numbers as soon as possible so that I can go ahead and get things booked.

This trip should appeal to all but the most blinkered, diehard prehistorians (oops that's me!). However I haven't given up hope that I may yet find some pre-Roman stuff somewhere. I also hope to wangle an invitation to an on-going excavation.

I would particularly appeal to any members who have never experienced the thrills of an EDAS field trip to come along. I can promise you some fascinating sites, thoroughly researched knowledge and above all great company. Along with these there will be Maynards usual mixture of bewilderment, mystery and serendipity (another coded message for getting lost!).

If you intend to come please furnish me with your email address, mobile phone number and £5 deposit per person so that I can pay for our expert.

Please reply if possible by the February meeting to me at brian.retired@ntlworld.com , or by phone / text to 07857694584, or see me at the meeting. Any questions please get in touch

Brian Maynard

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

DATE	EDAS EVENTS – 2014
12th February 2014	EDAS Lecture – "Augustus Moore, Wareham's disgraced Tobacco pipe maker", with Lilian Ladle, EDAS Member
12th March 2014	EDAS AGM and Lecture – Hod Hill, with Dave Stewart, EDAS Member
9th April 2014	EDAS Lecture – Egyptians and other Travelling People in Early Modern Dorset, with Judy Ford
14th May 2014	EDAS Lecture – Kingston Lacy, an undiscovered history, with David Smith, National Trust
7th - 13th June 2014	EDAS Field Trip – Lincolnshire – Details are being finalised. If you are interested please contact Brian Maynard at the next meeting or email on; brian.retired@ntlworld.com



East Dorset Antiquarian Society

NOMINATION FORM

Nomination for a General Committee Member:

Name of Nominee		Nominee's signature	
Name of Proposer		Proposer's signature	
Name of Secunder		Secunder's signature	

Please return the completed form to Brian Maynard, 7 Verity Crescent, Canford Heath, and Poole, BH17 8TH or brian.retired@ntlworld.com

Contact Telephone Number:

Date: