



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 – December 2014

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year

Another year passes and I think that it has been quite an exciting one for the society. We had a good programme of lectures covering a wide range of topics and each one was well attended. The field archaeology project at Druce Farm has been exceptional, and we received a great deal of interest from Dorset and beyond. We welcomed over 1000 visitors, ran a successful school visit programme and over 90 volunteers worked on the site. The field trip to Lincolnshire was well attended with several highlights, not least our visit to a Roman waterfront, revealed in the cellars of a bank in the city of Lincoln. Our membership continues to grow and we now have 225 members. There are some interesting and challenging activities planned for 2015, that we know members will enjoy.

EDAS Lecture: 'The Roman Army – Fact and Fiction' by John Smith

We were pleased to welcome John's return after 20 years (and 3 days), dressed in clothing appropriate to a Roman infantryman, and to hear his fascinating update on the Roman Army. Military history is, perhaps, a minority interest, but John's knowledge and enthusiasm brought the subject to life. Over the talk, he added the various pieces of equipment and weaponry to make up the full kit of a Roman infantryman. To be able to see the actual items of dress, weapons and equipment makes much more impact on the memory and imagination than a slide show.

Every item John wears or displays is a replica of an actual find, often from Dorset, or based directly on documentary and pictorial evidence. In some cases, of course, the evidence is insufficient to reproduce a whole item, so that a few are composites from more than one source. Clearly the Roman Army operated for many hundreds of years, so that styles and equipment changed over the years, in response to new technology and methods, changing needs relating to the opponents likely to be met or even just economic circumstances.

Dorset was heavily influenced by the Romans as one of the earlier areas conquered, with weaponry found at places like Hod Hill, Maiden Castle and Waddon Hill (near Bridport). There should also be considerable evidence from the 30 acre Lake Farm Roman fort or fortress astride the bypass just to the south-west of Wimborne. Initially a legionary base for the conquest, presumably for Legio II Augusta as it moved west, it may have been in use in some form from about 44 AD for 20 years or so. However, despite a good deal of excavation work in the 1970s, it has never been properly published; as John pointed out, an unforgivable waste of the considerable efforts of those involved that leaves a large hole in our knowledge of Roman Dorset. Perhaps a job for EDAS members during the winter(s)?



*John in full kit,
including chain mail*

(<http://www.viewfrompublishing.co.uk/news>)

The Roman Army didn't come to Britain for its health, nor for that of the inhabitants. Whether or not the invasion was because Claudius needed military success to bolster his grip on power, the Roman Army dealt in violence. Its job was to subdue the local population and gain the submission of its leaders, by negotiation if possible, intimidation if needed, but by war otherwise. Clearly, the threat of violence was always there, even if unstated or unused. After that, the serious business of extracting resources could begin, whether through taxes or tribute, often overseen by the army again. In Britain that particularly meant metals, notably iron and lead, and agricultural produce like cattle and grain.

John emphasised that the Roman Army was very good at its job; a well trained, highly disciplined, efficient and effective force. By the time the legions came to Britain they had had several hundred years to perfect their organisation, methods and weapons. They worked in units rather than as individuals, acting in ways that were drilled into them. Detailed organisation came from the centurions and their 'deputies' (*optios*), with senior commanders signalling manoeuvres by trumpet calls. Boudicca (or Boadicea!) basically pointed and shouted "charge". Unsurprising, then, who was likely to win.

John showed us a picture of the *Ermine Street Guard*, a well organised group of re-enactors who (you can check their website) make a huge effort to be authentic. But even they, by their own admission, get things wrong, and other re-enactors may be much less concerned with authenticity and more with how things appear. That, of course, is the Hollywood approach – whether it makes good cinema is far more important than whether it is accurate. So, for example, we see the heroic centurion in the front line and with a huge, brightly coloured, horse-hair plume on his helmet. As John pointed out many times, you have to use common sense and consider the practicality and effectiveness of what's being presented.



The Ermine Street Guard
(<http://www.erminestreetguard.co.uk/>)

It certainly doesn't make sense to put your very highly paid centurions, who are needed to direct their men, where they are very likely to be quickly killed, to dress them up as obvious targets for the enemy or to make their helmets much heavier and affected by every gust of wind. The modern British Army have learned not to make officers obvious targets, and rank insignia in places like Helmand Province are 'hidden' in the camouflage patterns of combat jackets.

Even the best re-enactors do need to 'look the part' so as to provide a spectacle for the public. They may use items more appropriate to the parade ground than the battlefield; a shiny helmet and armour is likely to make you an obvious target in a fight. But their kit may also be inauthentic because they've copied an interpretation that turns out to be wrong, because they're not up to date with recent research or because their equipment has simply been in use for a long time. Producing the full kit is both expensive and time-consuming, especially in trying to use the original technology, as John confirmed. Some of it does last; he said that 3 of the things he was showing us were the ones he'd used 20 years earlier.

What the better re-enactors do learn, as with John's own work with reconstructed battle gear, is the sheer practicality of the kit they're using. In essence, this is an effective form of experimental archaeology; if it doesn't work in repeated re-enactments then it is probably wrong. Interpretations made from fragmentary excavation finds, or unclear pictorial representations, can be refined and improved by 'testing' them. Similarly, views on how some items were used, or by what types of soldier (e.g. infantry, cavalry, specialist units), might be corrected. They certainly gain a view of the impact of the Roman Army in practice: as John well remembers, just the noise of full battle gear moving in rhythm and boots crashing in unison, from a relatively small group of re-enactors, was intimidating enough. Considering practicality here shows that the roads that the military built and used had to have gravel surfaces. Cobblestones may often have provided a foundation, but the soldiers' hobnailed boots would have slipped on smooth stone surfaces, especially in the rain, and jarred too much on the long marches soldiers often had to make. The Roman Army could move quickly, and to hear the noise and see the disciplined movement of a full Roman legion unexpectedly coming towards you shows that 'Shock and Awe' isn't a new invention.

That would equally apply to Roman artillery too, which could reach the enemy long before they could fight back. For example, the *ballista* used twisted sinew to store energy and release a large bolt with a range of about 400 metres. It would easily go right through you and, if they were standing in the right (or wrong!) place, hit 2 or 3 of your friends behind. A firing rate of 4 shots per minute could be achieved. Detailed descriptions of the impact of these and other weapons, allied to Roman tactics, made it clear why this, adult, version of John's presentation isn't suitable for children (there is a version aimed at children, which has proved very popular).



Reconstructed ballista

(<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/>)



John showing segmented armour

(<http://www.viewfrompublishing.co.uk/news>)

With the emphasis on practicality and effectiveness, John described the 3 types of armour used by the Roman military. Segmented armour (*lorica segmentata*) was made of relatively large overlapping pieces of metal and is the type worn by the *Ermine Street Guard* and most re-enactors. There are, though, a number of problems with it, not least that it is expensive to produce and difficult to maintain (there could be up to 400 separate components, although this reduced over time). It is also noisy in use and slow to put on; hardly ideal in a war. Scale armour (*lorica squamata*) is made of small, overlapping pieces of metal sewn onto a backing material, but suffers from some of the problems of segmented armour. Both of these needed to fit the individual well, making them less versatile than chain mail, which could be used by different sized people. It was, therefore, probably the most commonly used



Actual Roman scale armour

(<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/>)

armour, particularly as it is quick to put on, effective and tends to be more comfortable in use. Speed of response could, of course, be vital then as now. A British Army officer told John that modern modular body armour is designed to be put on in no more than a minute.

The Roman *pilum*, or javelin, was intended to penetrate an enemy's shield but came in different versions with several clever features. The hardened iron pyramidal head was designed to penetrate shields and kill or disable the enemy. If it penetrated the shield, the pyramid shape made it very difficult to remove and throw back, whilst the soft iron shank was quite weak and tended to bend, with the wooden shaft hanging down and totally hampering movement. The shield would have to be thrown away, leaving the person defenceless. If the *pilum* missed it would tend to leave the head on the ground pointing up towards the enemy, acting like a caltrap to spike their feet. More ordinary spears were also provided, usable in battle but probably more used in hunting when the army had to live off the land. John showed us one based on an example found at Hod Hill.

Of course, the Roman Empire was rich and every soldier had a sword, a real advantage against potential opponents, many of whom might have little more than a club or agricultural implement. There were several different types of sword, although those for the infantry tended to be relatively short for easy manoeuvrability in the press of battle, effective when stabbed through small gaps in the Romans' shield wall. Some were, of course, better made and more expensive, no doubt supplied to the better, frontline, soldiers. John had a replica of one called the 'Mainz type', for which evidence has come from Lake Farm, as well as of a so-called 'Pompeii type' found at Hod Hill. They were held in a sheath hanging from a baldric (or 'baldric') – a strap worn over one shoulder and across the chest (yes, the Romans had them long before Blackadder) – usually at the right. This may seem wrong for a



Two types of gladius (sword) shown by John

(<http://www.wanhs.org/JaneHill.html>)

right-handed infantryman, but experiments show that it works best. Ever practical, the Roman Army would put left handed soldiers at the left of the unit (obvious, once you know the answer).

Daggers were also provided, but handles were usually a personal purchase by the soldier. Some quite ornate and expensive examples have been found, though whether they were intended for battle usually rests on practicality again, e.g. how durable it would be in use and how good a grip it provided if covered in sweat and blood. Whilst many shields were flat, the legionaries tended to use curved rectangular shields like the popular image. They were generally of laminated wood, with criss-crossing of the grain to provide greater strength and resilience, and edged with brass for strength against enemy blows. The central boss, usually iron, protected the hand gripping the shield and could be an additional weapon for punching at the enemy. The background colour was black or red for identification in battle, and they may have had forms of standard unit design, but the individual soldier also decorated his own shield to personalise it, not unlike aircraft in WWII. A further 'personalised' item was the Roman Army boot, or *caligae*, which was tailored to the individual; if the army needed you to walk a long way and then fight effectively, they also needed your legs and feet to be in good shape.

This article can only give a flavour of the coverage of John's talk, and a sample of the items he showed us, talked about and passed around. Many of the original items were, as with many excavations, found in rubbish dumps (as we know from Druce Farm Roman villa, where many of the best finds were from ditches). On many sites the tips are outside the main area of settlement and missed by excavators, also missing much evidence of the lives of the people, be they military or civilian. Learning more about the Roman Army, and its kit, tells us a lot about the wider Roman society and its people. John made a plea that excavators should try to find, and dig, the rubbish dumps.

Whilst John passed around some smaller items during the talk, like pieces of scale armour, there was also plenty of opportunity to handle some of the kit both during the break and at the end of the talk. This obviously gives people a much better feel (pun not intended) for Roman life. The weapons may be replicas, and are all blunt, but they remain weapons; handling them is not encouraged! The high level of interest John had generated was very obvious from the length of time people continued to talk to him at the end of the meeting. We are very grateful to him for such an interesting talk and hope it won't be another 20 years before we see him again.

Geoff Taylor

NB The pictures above are, as acknowledged, from different internet sites and not from John's talk to EDAS members. EDAS do not, therefore, hold copyright and they should not be reproduced elsewhere.

Addendum

The November Newsletter contained an article on the talk given by Dr Cindy Wood about the Caged Chantries of Christchurch Priory. After reading the article she has kindly written back to amend one point of detail.

"I once gave a paper at a conference where an art historian was asked the question of whether the Salisbury chantry was the work of Pietro Torrigiano. After a delicate shudder (as is the wont of art historians), he proceeded to refute this attribution on the grounds of quality. Apparently the Salisbury chantry's engravings are an inferior quality to the other pieces of Torrigiano's work. This is also backed up in the historical record. The Salisbury chantry was started in 1529, and Torrigiano had left England in c.1517, after a second commission for Henry VIII which has not survived, and died in the prison of the Inquisition, in Spain, in 1528. This proves he did not build this chapel although he certainly influenced its design, as the first Renaissance sculptor in England in the early 16th century.

I am aware that this attribution is quite commonplace, but sadly is not accurate on either artistic or historical grounds. I am sure you and your members would like to be able to refute these historical inaccuracies when challenged!"

Dr. Cindy Wood

News from Druce

The Roman villa was 'packed away' in layers of black terram covered with stones in mid- October and will be uncovered for a final season next spring. Thanks to Andrew Morgan, Len and Pam Norris, Bryan Popple, Sue Cullinane, Robert Heaton, Ian Richardson, Sue Pinion and Mike Ladle who covered the site on one of the windiest days this year – fighting with rolls of terram in gale-force winds has to be experienced to be believed!!

All of the finds have been washed, marked and sorted, and pottery, bone and soil samples are currently with the relevant specialists. An 'Interim' note for the Dorset Proceedings has been prepared.

Recently, Andrew, Vanessa Joseph, Geoff Taylor and myself have started cataloguing the iron nail assemblage from the site; nails forming a high percentage of the iron finds. Dr Malcolm Lyne, who is also our pottery expert, will look at the remainder of the material (the stuff we can't identify!!).



Our site metal-detectorist, Richard Higham has been busy over the last few weeks and has added 10 further coins to the coin assemblage as well as a tiny, beautiful (once silvered) buckle, which has been dated to the 6th century AD.



Constantius II (obverse)



Constantius II (reverse)



Copper alloy and silvered buckle c. 6th century

Constantius II was one of the longest reigning emperors (AD 323-361), the coin dates from AD 358. We are gathering fantastic information regarding the 5th and 6th centuries – the 'Dark Ages' were not so dark at Druce!!

Lilian Ladle

GREAT DORSET ARCHAEOLOGY & MYSTERIES QUIZ

EDAS and the Priest House Museum are jointly organising a fun quiz night, to be held on

Friday 13th February 2015 starting at 7.30pm at the Priest House Museum.

Test your knowledge about Dorset, from the depths of prehistory to the modern era. Even if you can't answer some of the questions you will go away having learned some interesting facts!

There will be ten rounds of questions, with a break for light refreshments.

This is a team quiz with up to 6 people per team and the charge is £5 per person. Just let us know if you want to attend – we can help arrange you into teams if necessary. The price includes the refreshments.

Tickets will be on sale from the Wimborne Tourist Information Office, next to the Priest House Museum, or can be arranged through Bryan Popple and Andrew Morgan.

Please book as soon as possible to help us finalise the arrangements.

Proceeds will be shared between the PHM and EDAS

COUNCIL for INDEPENDENT ARCHAEOLOGY

2015 Conference

As many of you will know the CIA is dedicated to promoting the cause of archaeology and promoting the role of amateur archaeologists. A notable success being the clarification of the Valetta Convention which threatened amateur led activities.

EDAS is delighted to have been invited to host the 2015 conference and we will be finalising the arrangement over the next couple of months. It is a one day conference to be held on a Saturday next September/October.

The conference will be open to all interested archaeologists; you do not need to be a member of the CIA to attend.

Further details to follow.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

DATE	EDAS EVENTS – 2014
10th December 2014	EDAS Lecture – Saxon Wimborne and East Dorset, with Janet Seal
DATE	EDAS EVENTS – 2015
14 th January 2015	EDAS Lecture – Geomantics in Archaeology with Ben Urmston, Wessex Archaeology
11th February 2015	EDAS Lecture – The Protected Wrecks on the South Coast, with Mark Beattie-Edwards, Programme Director Nautical Archaeology Society
13th February 2015	Great Dorset Archaeology and Mystery Quiz – 7.30 pm Priest House Museum, Wimborne. Tickets £5, for more details ask Bryan Popple or Andrew Morgan
11 th March 2015	EDAS Lecture – Life & Death in Pompeii and Herculaneum, with Paul Roberts Curator British Museum. To be held at the Marconi Lecture Theatre, Bournemouth University
25th March 2015	EDAS AGM followed by members' evening
8th April 2015	EDAS Lecture – Catalhoyuk Neolithic Settlement, with Professor Peter Andrews, Curator of Blandford Museum
13th May 2015	EDAS Lecture – The Portable Antiquaries Scheme and the Treasure Act, with Ciorstaidh Hayward Trevarthen, Dorset Finds Officer
13th to 20 th June 2015	EDAS Field Trip – Cambridgeshire area. Led by Keith and Denise Allsop. Details to follow.

Note: unless otherwise stated all lectures start at 7.30pm and are held at **St Catherine's Church Hall, Lewens Lane, Wimborne, BH21 1LE.**