



East Dorset Antiquarian Society

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Established 1983

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NEWSLETTER – JANUARY 2016

EDAS COMMITTEE VACANCIES

This is an opportunity to become more involved with running the society, in March there will be three vacancies on the EDAS Committee. All we are looking for is a desire to get stuck in and make a contribution. There are four meetings per year, all held at the Priest House Museum, Wimborne. Please find an application form at end of newsletter and apply by 17th February 2016.

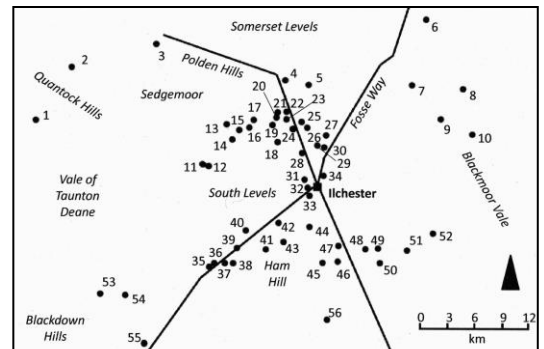
We are also looking for a new editor to produce this newsletter; this doesn't have to be done by a committee member.

If you would like further information then please speak to one of the committee members or contact Andrew Morgan at andrewmorgz@aol.com

EDAS Lecture: 'Two villas in Somerset and one in Hampshire: excavations at Dinnington, Yarford and Meonstoke and their contribution to Romano-British archaeology' by Professor Tony King

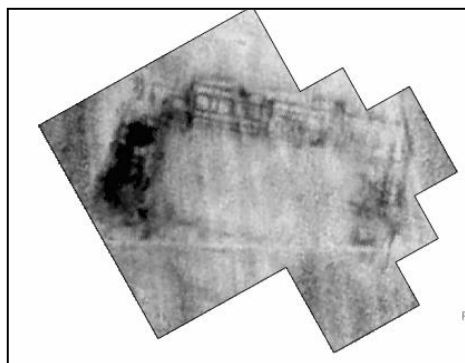
Tony is Professor of Roman Archaeology, amongst other roles, at the University of Winchester, and was involved in the excavation of all 3 of the villas that he described to us.

A distribution map of Roman villas in Britain shows that they are very much concentrated south and east of a line from the Severn to the Humber. There are few in Devon and Cornwall (or, indeed, in the New Forest) and Yarford (no. 1 on the map) is at the western edge of the main distribution, fairly isolated from other villas. Dinnington (no. 35) lies further east, one of about 50 Roman villas around Ilchester and very close to several others. For example, Crimbleford Knap (no. 36) is just across a brook and Lopen (no. 38) is 1.5km away, also by the brook.



Dinnington, by far the larger of the two villas (similar in size to Chedworth), is on excellent, flat agricultural land and close to the Fosse Way, to which it was linked by a short roadway. Luckily for the excavators it's also very close to a pub (Roman villa builders aren't always so considerate). Lopen villa was known and being publicised, resulting in the locals saying "we've got one too" because of the earlier finds from the fields.

A review of old aerial photographs and then geophysical surveys and excavation in 2002 2005-8, both with Time Team involvement, proved they were right and demonstrated the extent of the villa. The



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resistivity plot shown here is clearest, and shows the south-facing courtyard villa, which probably had porticoes all around the courtyard. It has similarities to Druce, though is larger; the east and west wings are 70m long, the north wing 120m. Other work shows that the nearby ditches and field systems are aligned with the villa.

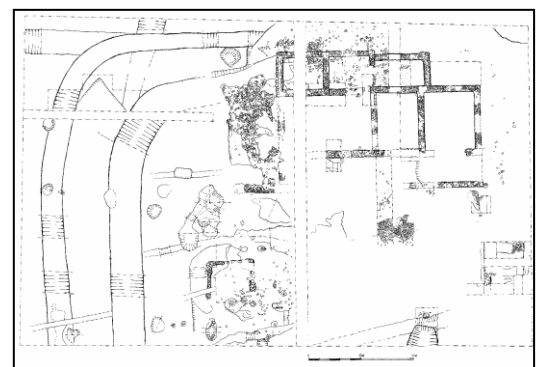
Most of the north wing 'walls' proved to be foundations and robber trenches, but massive enough to imply a huge construction, especially what seemed to have been a tower of at least 2 stories at the western end. Limited excavation on the east wing suggested this was the more utilitarian side of the villa. Excavation concentrated on the west wing, where the rubble on the resistivity survey hid mosaics and the best preserved part of the villa. It seems to have been the main living and reception area, at least from the late 3rd/early 4th century when the major part of it was built, with evidence of a second storey in parts, at least. The other wings did produce some remains of painted plaster and mosaics, though their quality was not of the standard of the east wing.

The west wing had contained hypocausts, a relatively small bath suite and, sadly much damaged, high quality figured mosaics, one said by the experts to have the widest range of colours of any in Britain. Reconstructing their designs is proving difficult in many respects, though they are thought to be from the Ilchester 'school' of mosaicists, as with our main mosaic at Druce. One, at least, is very similar to a mosaic at nearby Lopen, whilst the later one from the dining hall seems to show a scene from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and other fragments also appear to relate to mythological themes. Other finds include a column, not unlike the base from Druce, and part of a limestone sculpture identifiable as Hercules wrestling with Antaeus. The owner wanted to demonstrate his classical learning – obviously impossible if others didn't have such knowledge too.



There is little evidence of any Iron Age precursor, with initial small and probably timber-framed buildings in the late 1st or early 2nd century. As with most villas, the buildings went through several phases of construction, but the more major and costly work came much later, as with the west wing building above. Perhaps the most interesting change was the building of the large, heated, apsidal dining hall, with its mythological mosaic, at the north end of the west wing during the mid-4th century (it is difficult to date as so much has been robbed). Later, further rooms were added on the west side of this range, one with a hypocaust and probably a mosaic. However, despite this expensive building in what seems to be the villa's heyday, there is strong evidence of more utilitarian uses for these rooms by the end of the century, about the time the coin sequence ends. Activity seems to have continued well into the 5th century and perhaps even into the 6th. Whilst the villa was clearly losing its status as an elite dwelling, it continued into post-Roman use (as did Druce). This could be seen as a 'Roman continuation' since the Saxons didn't reach this far west till long after the traditional end of Roman rule in 410.

Perhaps unusually, the site of **Yarford** wasn't known locally and even aerial survey had only found the ditches and enclosures of prehistoric and possible Romano-British activity. The villa wasn't discovered until excavations in 2003-5, within and partly over the double D-shaped, defensive ditched enclosure of a late Iron Age settlement. It was probably built in the late 3rd century and, like Druce, the buildings face south on a moderate slope in good agricultural land. Prior to the villa, a simple mid-late 2nd century farmhouse was built that respected the earlier ditches, but also showed signs of 'Romanisation' (i.e. rectilinear architecture and use of samian ware).



This is a 'row villa' – a line of main rooms fronted by a portico or verandah facing a courtyard, with a line of smaller rooms behind the main ones, one of which was added in the mid 4th century. A small bath house closes off the courtyard to the east, with hypocausted rooms to the south. There was also a hypocaust under the middle of the northern rooms, but the most important room was that at the east

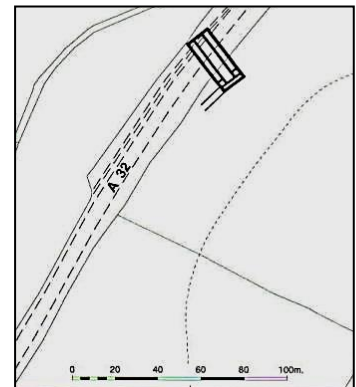
of the main range. With its portico, it contained a high quality polychrome mosaic of which enough survives to show that it was meant to be viewed from the north, no doubt from the couches of a dining room, from which it is likely that there was a good view over the valley (north is at the bottom of this painting of the main part of the mosaic).

This is an early mosaic design, with a similar one known from Colchester 150 years earlier, though the central wine vessel is stylistically 4th century. This exactly parallels the 'retro' approach of the swastika mosaic at Druce. It suggests that pattern books existed and that old ones remained available, but may have a greater significance in harking back to earlier times (of course, it may just be that the owner liked it!). This was clearly a room designed to impress, although it is less clear who was being impressed – near neighbours who hadn't seen such things or people travelling over the Quantocks from the Ilchester area around 20 miles away?

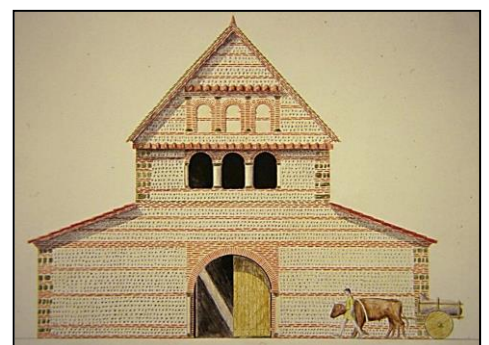
As with Dinnington and, indeed, many villas in Britain, decline is evident in the later 4th century. The polychrome painted plaster was repainted mostly white and the wear damage to the mosaic went unrepaired. There are 4 deep holes in a line suggestive of a weaving frame and 2 deeper ones that probably held props for the ceiling or roof. The room was certainly being used as there were no loose tesserae. In this and some of the other rooms, debris suggests workshop activity, apparently near the end of the 4th century, after which the building decayed and the roof and walls collapsed onto the debris. And so it remained, unknown and untouched for 1,600 years.

The **Meonstoke** Roman villa (sometimes known as Shavards Farm) lies about halfway between Fareham and Alton, about 10km east of Winchester. As with most Hampshire villas, it is on the more fertile chalk, rather than the sand and gravels of the Southampton basin or the poor New Forest land. It was found in the 1930s when the A32 was widened, but excavation didn't begin until 1986. Within the last year, geophysical survey work has shown further archaeology around the site, including a Bronze Age ring ditch and Anglo-Saxon cemetery. There is also an hexagonal building which may be a Romano-Celtic temple; if so this will be very interesting as they're usually octagonal, and further investigation is planned in 2016.

Much has been lost to the road, but the main accommodation appears to have been an aisled building of c.30x15m, built no earlier than the mid-3rd century on the burnt remains of a 2nd century building. It had painted plaster and at least one mosaic, although the remains were almost all loose tesserae. A hypocaust was added early in the 4th century and a new facade, leaving a narrow corridor between it and the original facade. This new facade fell forward, away from the building at some time later (Pastscape puts it around AD 500; a coin shows it wasn't before AD 353) and some of it was preserved and discovered in the excavation. This is, of course, exactly what happened to the aisled building at Druce, though that wasn't the main villa accommodation and there are obviously differences in the wall design and, indeed, how it fell. Nevertheless, to actually recognise such an 'intact' fallen wall as more than just rubble isn't very common, especially as what's left is usually the back of the wall without its facing material (lost to the plough or robbed). Mortimer Wheeler had a fallen wall at Maiden Castle but didn't realise.



At Meonstoke, the top part of the wall seems to have fallen first, with the lower part falling on top of it and being lost subsequently. Although the top part lost some of the inside facing material over the centuries, it was protected from being completely broken up by a hedge planted over it. After careful excavation it was clear that even this top part of the wall had 2 rows of 3 tile-framed, arched openings, with the higher ones blocked up and the lower ones (shown) open. The roofline was clear, showing a very steep pitch, as were horizontal courses, cornices and the specially made circular tiles used as columns between the openings. Clearly this was a tall building, very like an aisled church with clerestory windows, and measurements suggest a scheme of standardised units in multiples of Roman feet. Whilst obviously not



certain without the lower part of the fallen wall, the reconstruction below seems the most likely appearance of the wall originally. It is very similar to an 8th or 9th century Romanesque church in Metz, France.

The British Museum wanted to lift a whole row of windows to place on display, but had to settle for the central part of the upper level because of the weight. This was packed in a metal box with expanded polystyrene and girders pushed underneath, then turned over and the front excavated in a marquee outside the museum. The only covering layer was that of the blind openings, so it's clear that the tiles were on show.

As with the other villas, Meonstoke seems to have continued to be used even when ruined, although dating this has proved difficult. Villas declined first in the east, and lasted longer in the west, so it seems likely that this one was in decline before the 2 in Somerset.

We are grateful to Tony for giving us these insights into the rise and fall of Roman villas and, of course, for demonstrating the parallels with the Druce Farm villa. For those wanting even more information:

https://www.academia.edu/13097905/Dinnington_and_Yarford_two_Roman_villas_in_south_and_west_Somerset

'The south-east façade of Meonstoke aisled building', in P. Johnson and I. Haynes (ed.), *Architecture in Roman Britain*, York: CBA Research Report 94, 1996, 56-69.

Geoff Taylor

DORSET COUNTY MUSEUM – Ancient Dorset Gallery

On 6th November the new Ancient Dorset Gallery at Dorset County Museum was formally opened by Julian Richards supported by an assortment of local dignitaries.

The gallery was mainly funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and has been designed to tell the story of the South Dorset Ridgeway from the Palaeolithic to the Norman Conquest. There are many fine displays including four of the fifty young scandinavian males who were beheaded on Ridgeway Hill c. 900AD.

There are numerous stunning artefacts on display including the Tarrant Valley gold lunula, an Iron Age mirror and a restored Roman glass jug from Bucknowle Villa.



Also there are objects that were found on the EDAS excavation at Worth Matravers, including the stone anchor used as a pillow within a grave in the post-Roman cemetery, and the Bronze Age glass fragment found in the midden site.

Andrew Morgan

Cranborne Chase AONB Foundations of Archaeology Project

The latest event organised by Philippe Planel and Emma Rouse was a visit to Salisbury Museum on 5th December which was attended by several EDAS members.

Here we enjoyed a very informative talk by Jane Ellis-Schon, Curator for Salisbury Museum's Finding Pitt-Rivers Project; when she described the work undertaken by Pitt-Rivers and the methodology he devised to meticulously record his excavations. He had a military background and was an experienced surveyor, skills he no doubt taught to his trusted employees. His most famous archaeological work was carried out on his own estate on Cranborne Chase between Wiltshire and Dorset. We also visited the library where Jane had brought out an early edition of the volumes he carefully prepared and published privately "Pitt Rivers: Excavations in Cranborne Chase". The quantity of the information and the quality of the drawings and plans was excellent. The museum also has a number of detailed and very accurate models that he made of individual excavation sites. Later we were able to visit the archive and enjoy handling some of the objects that Pitt-Rivers had excavated.

Pitt-Rivers was keen to share his knowledge and Jane showed us several educational posters he had made to support the talks he gave about his excavations. Jane explained that as part of his commitment to education, in 1880 he built a museum at Farnham to display some anthropological specimens and his Wessex archaeological collection which contained objects from Cranborne Chase. Pitt-Rivers aimed to make the museum an attraction for a very large audience and to offer something different from other museums. The museum existed until the 1960s. In the 1950's Stella Pitt-Rivers, a relative, sold several of the more expensive items from the collection. Nevertheless a significant part of the Pitt-Rivers Wessex Collection was donated to the Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum in 1975 by HM Treasury. This collection can now be seen in the excellent new Wessex Gallery of Archaeology.

We look forward to hearing Jane again when she gives a talk about Pitt-Rivers at our April meeting.

For further information about the project see: <http://www.ccwvdaonb.org.uk/our-work/foundations-of-archaeology/>

Andrew Morgan

EAST DORSET ARCHAEOLOGY PLANNING GROUP – Pilot Project

**Next Meeting Friday 5th February 2016 between 2 - 4 pm. TBC
Priest House Museum, Learning Centre**

We have decided to continue the pilot to next May, a full 12 months, which should be sufficient time to properly evaluate whether we have met our objectives and made a useful contribution to the archaeology of East Dorset.

There is growing interest about the group from local councillors throughout Dorset. In December we were asked to submit an article about the group for a newsletter sent to Dorset Town and Parish Councillors. Then we were invited to speak to the Ferndown Town Council Planning Committee about the archaeology of Ferndown. The audience of seven councillors and twelve members of the public were suitably impressed by a thirty minute presentation we put together and have asked for an article for their local newsletter. There is every likelihood that other parishes will request an overview of their local archaeology. This was an interesting exercise and would offer opportunities for EDAS members to do something similar for their own parishes.

All the people actively involved in this project find it rewarding and a good way to increase their knowledge of the archaeology of East Dorset. Anybody with an interest in this project who would like to find out how we approach this challenging task is invited to attend our next meeting. If you prefer you can restrict your involvement to assessing planning applications for your local area.

This is still a pilot so there is always room for improvement.

For further information please contact Andrew Morgan, email: andrewmorgz@aol.com

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Note-1: the date of our February meeting has been brought forward by a week because of Lent which starts on Ash Wednesday 10th February.

Note-2: our April meeting will be held at Bournemouth University. The lecture about Pitt-Rivers has been chosen for our second joint lecture with the Students' Archaeology and Anthropology Society.

2015-2016 Programme

Date	Speaker	Title
Wed 13th Jan 2016	Stephen Fisher Maritime Archaeology Trust	"Forgotten Wrecks of the First World War"
Wed 3rd Feb 2016	Dr. John McNabb, Southampton University	"New Insights into Human Evolution"
Wed 9th Mar 2016	AGM	Members evening
Wed 13th Apr 2016	Jane Ellis-Schön Salisbury Museum	"Finding Pitt-Rivers" Note: this lecture will be held in a lecture theatre on Bournemouth University Talbot Campus.
Wed 11th May 2016	Dr Alex Langlands, Swansea University	"Mapping the Genius Loci: Exploring the Character of Space and Place in the Ordnance Survey"

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



East Dorset Antiquarian Society

GENERAL COMMITTEE MEMBER NOMINATION FORM

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

Contact Telephone Number:

Date:

Please return the completed form to Geoff Taylor, EDAS Secretary, by 17th February 2016, using either:

post: 224 Leigh Road, Wimborne, Dorset, BH21 2BZ

or

email: geoffnsue@hotmail.co.uk