



Established 1983

East Dorset Antiquarian Society

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NEWSLETTER – NOVEMBER 2016

EDAS Lecture: Finding Duropolis: a new type of Iron Age settlement for Dorset, by Dr Miles Russell of Bournemouth University

As expected this fascinating talk by Miles Russell was very popular and we had one our largest audiences including a number of guests. Several EDAS members are actively involved in this exciting project especially Dave Stewart who has undertaken much of the geophysical survey of the site, whilst Kel Barrass and Jane Randall work on the finds.

The Durotriges Project was set up in 2009 as an archaeological investigation studying the transition from the late Iron Age to the early Roman period in southern England, through a detailed programme of field survey, geophysical investigation and targeted excavation. The project started in the summer of 2009 but a series of startling discoveries has extended the project through to 2016 and promises to continue for a few years yet.

Miles explained that the Durotriges were a discrete group of people living in the area roughly compatible with modern day Dorset, stretching to southern Wiltshire and south east Somerset. They were first identified and recorded by the Romans, but there is no explanation of where the name originated. Nevertheless the Durotriges were different from other tribal grouping in the area, with a unique footprint of cultural markers; crouched inhumation burials when most other tribes used cremation; a pre-Roman coinage which is not a copy of a Roman style and did not feature a head of state; the tribe constructed hillforts; they were belligerent and opposed the Roman invasion; they developed a specific style of pottery named black-burnished ware and used symbols in the style of Celtic art. This clearly marks them out from their contemporary neighbouring tribes, especially the Atrebates and the Belgae, to the east, and the Dumnonii and Dobunni, to the west and north.



IA Crouched burial

The traditional description of the Durotrigians was provided by the renowned archaeologists Mortimer and Tessa Wheeler who excavated Maiden Castle between 1934-37. Mortimer, a man of the British Empire and a survivor of the Great War interpreted archaeological evidence in terms of warriors, invasion and resistance. He found a cemetery at the eastern gate of Maiden Castle containing 52 skeletal remains, 14 of which showed evidence of extreme violence. He interpreted this to prove that the fortification had been defended by fierce Celtic warriors who had been brutally defeated by their Roman conquerors. Later excavations by Niall Sharples in 1980's showed that the hillfort had been abandoned by 100BC and that most of the burials were pre-Roman.

Miles and Paul Cheatham set up the project to revisit this rather dramatic description of the Durotrigians. They looked for a site outside a hillfort and in 2009 they were introduced to Rebecca Hill of Winterborne Kingston. Field walking and metal detecting had uncovered many finds on her farm land from this transition period between the Iron Age and the Roman era.

The first phase of the project lasted from 2009 until 2013 and uncovered a spectacular late Iron Age 'banjo' enclosure settlement dating from 350 – 100 BC. Within the enclosure they discovered a number of round houses, work surfaces, storage pits and the footings of a Roman masonry building. Miles explained that IA hillforts and banjo enclosures were abandoned by 100BC. The area contained 65 pits that were of cylindrical form and between 1.5 and 2.5metres deep. None contained evidence of original purpose, but all had been filled and contained many finds. Numerous remains of sacrificed animals were discovered and many arrangements of different animal parts, creating hybridised creatures. Many were positioned soon after butchering. There was no discernible pattern of deposition. But the remains of smaller animals such as dogs were articulated whereas cows and horse remains were disarticulated.

Near the entrance to the enclosure 17 Durotrigan crouch burials were found positioned after the enclosure had been abandoned. They were placed on their right side with their heads facing north away from the sun. The Roman building was quite simple in construction in the form of a long house dating from AD320-380.

The warm spring of 2014 offered favourable opportunities for crop marks and enabled the team to examine those shown on new aerial photographs. Not far from the banjo enclosure the unmistakable signs of round houses were detected and it was decided to extend the project to investigate this area.

In 2015 two new trenches were opened up. In Trench A where the signs of a single round house had been detected a total of seven round houses were found under the soil and in Trench B where two round houses had been detected another seven were found. Their entrances were aligned to the SE to benefit from the rising sun, contrary to the more relaxed arrangements of Roman dwellings where the entrances were aligned to the setting sun in the SW. From further study of the geophysical surveys prepared by Dave Stewart the team now estimate that within an area of just under four hectares there are between 150 and 200 round houses. The question is whether they were contemporary or represent a population that gradually moved across the landscape. The team were keen to identify whether the buildings had different functional uses. The associated pits were left open and show signs of weathering, unlike those found in the banjo enclosure. Again they feature carefully placed deposits, including three pigs that had been sacrificed but not butchered, six contained the heads of horses. Miles explained that whilst the horse was undoubtedly an elite animal these people ate horse meat. The deposition of large slabs of meat in a number of pits demonstrates that the community had wealth and an abundance of resources. Several contained mixed animal parts such as the upper part of a cow's head with a lower jaw taken from a horse. The sacrifice of so many animals and the unusual treatment of their bones provides an insight into Iron Age belief systems – and may suggest that the Ancient Britons had beliefs or mythologies which involved hybridised animals, like the ancient Greeks.



Cow skull with horse lower jaw

Throughout the Iron Age period there is no evidence that these people ate shellfish or fish from rivers or sea. The reason is not known but possibly due to religious beliefs. In fact there is little evidence that they needed to hunt, being able to rely on their livestock for meat. There is much evidence of domestic activity from the midden deposits, to the delight of any archaeologist, plus quern stones for grinding cereal seeds, spindle whorls and loom weights used for weaving and metal working debris from iron, lead and copper smelting.

One important fact is that there is no sign of a defensive structure; the settlement sits on an undefended plateau, suggesting it was occupied during a period of stability and comparative security. There is a spring line to the north and water is also available from the Winterbourne in the valley.

The size of the site is very significant and soon came to the attention of the newspapers. When interviewed by the press Miles stated that this must be the earliest town yet recorded in Britain and gave it the slightly inappropriate but headline grabbing name of Duropolis. The people of Colchester, which had been regarded as the oldest town in Britain, were not amused!

In 2016 the team opened two new trenches. Trench D was opened to examine two lengths of ditches which were near the settlement. These proved to be from the late Bronze Age and appear to be land boundaries. Also they uncovered a causeway enclosure and storage pits now filled with interrupted midden deposits. There were fifteen

Iron Age style crouch burials in the softer fill of these ditches. Of particular interest are seven flint-lined structures built into the chalk with a T-shape which may have been corn dryers or malting ovens for the making of a beer-type beverage. Also they have uncovered signs of sub-Roman activity with a small farming settlement containing five buildings with sunken floors cut into the chalk, plus work surfaces and associated kilns and ovens dated from the period 300-450AD.



T-shaped corn dryer

Trench E at the southern edge of the site uncovered another Iron Age roundhouse, pits and another T-shaped corn dryer.

Miles concluded by saying that the site appears to have been occupied from around 100BC, at a time when most of the hillfort enclosures of Dorset, such as Maiden Castle and Hod Hill, were being abandoned, and that these roundhouses had fallen out of use by AD100. He said that there was a long period possibly lasting 2-300 years after the Roman invasion when the indigenous rural population gradually adopted elements of Roman lifestyle. In one grave they recovered an imported pot of a Gallo-Belgian style. There are examples of Roman style hair pins used by the local women.



Burial with Gallo-Belgian pot

There were a number of questions from the audience and we offered Miles our sincere thanks for his fascinating and often humorous talk. We look forward to another site visit next summer.

This is undoubtedly the most important project in Dorset and is of national importance. It will continue in 2017 and beyond. It offers opportunities for members of the public to participate, so check it out if you are interested. The public are able to visit the site during the well-publicised Open-Days.

Andrew Morgan

Walk around Wimborne with Dr David Reeve on 9 October 2016

Twenty nine members met on a lovely autumn morning in Wimborne for a walk rediscovering the Saxon origins of the town led by Dr David Reeve, who has carried out extensive research in the area.

We focused first on the Saxon Double Monastery founded by King Ine for his sister Cuthgberga between 688 and 700 and the college of secular canons founded in the 1040s; looking at the clues in the street patterns, topography and archaeology. Whilst nothing above ground survives of the original church, where 2 kings and 2 saints were buried, there are some late Saxon work surviving within the fabric of the existing Minster. It is highly likely that this second church would have been built over the original church since it was one of the most venerated in Wessex and was a pilgrimage centre.

We then discussed the likely location of the Saxon Royal Palace that was built sometime before 900. David made the case for it being on the site of Deans Court, before revealing that the early medieval hall still survives in the existing fabric (two large and substantial stone walls) and revealed circumstantial evidence that suggests that there hall may even have been the Saxon Royal Palace itself!

We then began to explore the development of the town outside of the monastic site as well as locating the three chapels that supported the town's population. This included the recent discoveries of a small ditch running east west under the Priest House Museum and how it and the property boundaries to the south are on a different alignment than those to the north of the ditch.

We finished by discussing the finds in the Square, the location of St Peters Chapel, and the site of St Mary chapel and its precinct, built around 1000 by Horton Priory.

Many thanks to David for a very interesting tour. David has agreed to lead a further walk on Sunday 8 October 2017 looking at C17th Wimborne which was the subject of his PhD so put this one in your diary now.

Peter Walker

WESSEX ACADEMY for FIELD ARCHAEOLOGY - Wafa

Wafa started out as an idea from the Wessex branch of the CBA (Council for British Archaeology) in early 2013. It grew out of the realisation that many of those who have a fascination with archaeology would love to be able to get involved with its practicalities. They would like to learn how to 'read' landscapes, how to recognise ancient finds and how to dig. But there was a problem – there was nowhere in the Wessex area that all these skills were being taught.

A home was found at Ash Farm, near Stourpaine in Dorset, through the generosity of the Russell family

The vision came from Julian Richards – Wafa's lead archaeologist and CBA member.

Programme of Wafa Courses 2016

Saturday 12 November 2016: Fieldwalking Learn about the techniques of surface collection

Saturday 26 November 2016: Experimental Coppicing day

Saturday, 17 December 2016: Day School - All you ever wanted to know about Stonehenge

For further information and costs please check out: <http://www.wafa.org.uk/>

2018 FIELD TRIP – South East Wales

Preliminary research has already started regarding the 2018 EDAS Field Trip field trip to South East Wales.

Caerleon, Caerwent, Llantony Abbey, Offa's Dyke and as many prehistoric sites as possible may well feature. We will also try and accommodate a visit to some industrial sites to explore the more recent heritage of this area.

Several members have already stated their interest and we thank everyone who has made suggestions.

The programme will be developed over the next year.

If you are interested in joining the trip or have any thoughts about this area please contact

Geoff Taylor or Andrew Morgan.

EDAS PROGRAMME 2016-2017

Date	Speaker/Leader	Title
Wed 9 Nov 2016	Richard Osgood, Operation Nightingale	The Archaeology of World War I
Wed 14 Dec 2016	Lawrence Shaw, New Forest National Park Authority	Shedding light on the New Forest's history: the results of LIDAR and other surveys
Wed 11 Jan 2017	Prof. Peter Andrews, Natural History Museum & Blandford Museum	An ape's view of human evolution: our fossil ape relatives and how they lived
Wed 8 Feb 2017 at the University	Prof. Tim Darvill, Bournemouth University	A tomb with a view: new investigations on Cotswold-Severn long barrows
Wed 8 Mar 2017	AGM	Members' Evening
Wed 5 Apr 2017 - NOT 2nd Wednesday	Martin Papworth, National Trust	The late great Medieval manor house of Kingston Lacy
Wed 10 May 2017	Kris Strutt, University of Southampton	Atomic magnetism, current & dielectric permittivity: how Physics has the potential to transform Archaeology: new discoveries from geophysics at Old Sarum and other sites

Note: unless otherwise stated all lectures are from 7.30 – 9.30 pm and are held at **St Catherine's Church Hall, Lewens Lane, Wimborne, BH21 1LE.**

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