East Dorset Antiquarian Society

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NEWSLETTER – January 2021

Wishing everyone a HAPPY NEW YEAR

Editor's Notes

I very much hope that 2021 will be a better year than 2020 for us all, especially as vaccinations are now being rolled out. It seems, though, that we'll have to go through another difficult period first – as I write this the new national lockdown is being announced; sad but inevitable. Please stay safe (and do your best to stay sane of course), and I'm hoping that we can return to lectures in the hall and see each other again at some time this year.

Meanwhile, we were pleased to be able to hear Mark Corney's Zoom lecture in December; thanks also to Andrew for the summary: **Villas, Churches and Baptisteries - evidence of Christianity in Roman Britain.**

This month's Zoom lecture is on Wednesday 13th January at 7:30 by Sophy Charlton, who will be telling us about 'Finding Mesolithic Britain: Biomolecular Approaches to Hunter-Gatherer Archaeology' – how new technology can shed light on the lives of our ancestors.
As before, the Zoom link will be sent out a few days prior; those not normally receiving it can email a request to Andrew Morgan: andrewmorgz@aol.com

There's an article on a place to visit in Spain that I wrote some time ago… I'm sure we will be able to go there before the year is out: **Italica – the great Roman city you may never have heard about**.

A bumper set of **Weblinks** and **Highlights** from Alan Dedden in his very long running series, not only providing items of interest but things that you can follow up further.

Neil Meldrum has kindly provided the 6th in his series of articles on mankind's spiritual evolution, taking us much closer to the present time with **The Advent of Agriculture**. As Neil told me, there is still uncertainty and a certain amount of controversy over when agriculture started in different places and which regions were independent.

Jo Crane & Sue Newman's aerial photographs provide yet more interest in **View from Above 33**, whilst the series based on Roman epitaphs also continues with **Remembering the Romans X**.

I will try to do a 'Bulletin' or two of more topical items to help keep people occupied, but they won't have a lot in them unless you send me things that you think would be interesting or helpful.
Contributions and feedback to geoffnsue@hotmail.co.uk; please don't just 'REPLY'

Geoff Taylor

P.S. The CBA Wessex January Newsletter can be found here

Villas, Churches and Baptisteries - evidence of Christianity in Roman Britain: Zoom lecture by Mark Corney

Mark is a specialist in Roman history, an Honorary Research Fellow at Bristol University and a great friend of EDAS. His presentation examined the evidence for Christianity in Roman Britain through to the post-Roman period, covering the latest discoveries and explaining the difficulties of interpretation.

Initially Christianity would have been considered just another cult, one of many throughout the Roman Empire. However, it was different – monotheistic and with adherents intolerant of other gods, which encouraged periods of persecution. In Britain there may well have been many martyrs, but only three are known by name. Aaron and Julius are mentioned by Gildas (a 6th century British monk); their names suggest a military connection and they were likely killed in Caerleon sometime before AD 290 when the legion was re-located. Alban, the third named, was of sufficient importance that Germanus, Bishop of Auxerre, described visiting his shrine in AD 429, when he visited Britain to resolve a religious dispute.

The adoption of Christianity by Constantine was a step change. It is said he experienced a vision that led him to adopt the Chi-rho symbol, which was displayed by his troops when they won the critical Battle of Milvian Bridge. Within 6 months he had issued the Edict of Milan (AD 313) proclaiming that Christianity must be tolerated throughout the Empire, then convened the Council of Arles in 314. This was the first church council or synod, called to resolve theological differences and determine the laws, the canons of the Christian church. The records show Britain was represented by three Bishops: Restitus of London; Erubus from York and Adelfius of Lincoln, covering three of the four Roman provinces in Britain. This proves that the Christian church was established in Britain before Constantine and then integrated into the wider church. There followed a series of councils when representatives of the Christian church met, with the presence of British bishops recorded for those at Serdica (AD 343) and Ariminum (AD 359).

Although Christianity didn't become the state religion until 380, with Theodosius' Edict of Thessalonica, its adoption by Constantine meant that it became the official cult of the Emperors (excluding a brief return to paganism under Julian in 361-363), demonstrated by Christian symbols on their coinage.

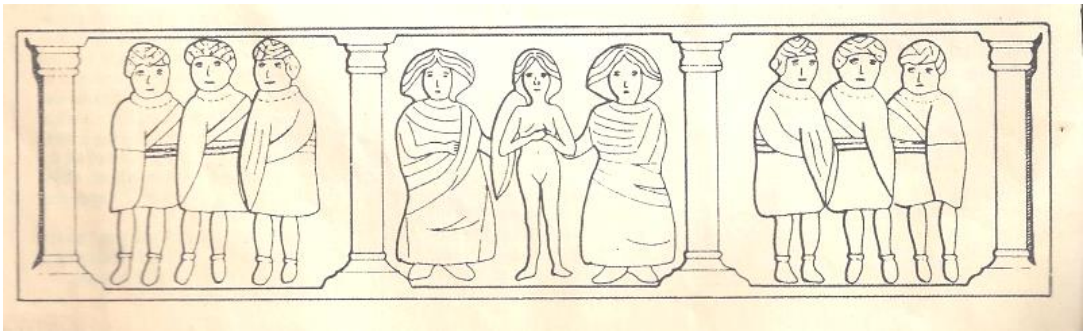
Constantine (307-337)

Magnentius (350-353)

Following state approval Christian iconography, including fish, peacocks, anchors as well as the Chi-rho, started to appear on a range of objects and personal artefacts. This doesn't prove a conversion to Christianity, but it does suggest the cult was widespread, at least amongst the Roman elite. The importance of the faith amongst the general population isn't, clear although a lead curse recovered from the baths of Bath (*Aquae Sulis*) suggests that Christians were quite common there, and begins "Whether pagan or Christian, whether man or woman, whether boy or girl, whether slave or free, whoever has stolen from me ……". A number of hoards have been

uncovered that contain precious objects featuring Christian symbols. One of the most impressive is the Water Newton Treasure (shown above), found near Peterborough, a stunning assemblage of 4th century Roman silver. Several pieces feature Christian symbols, so this may be a collection of liturgical silver. Items with Christian symbols have also been found in other hoards, such as the Canterbury Hoard and the Traprain Law Treasure from East Lothian.

Another important class of objects is a group of large circular lead tanks, some of which carry Christian imagery, with over 20 examples in Britain. They vary in size from 0.46m to 0.97m in diameter and are potentially portable baptismal fonts, with examples from Ashton, Northants; Pulborough, West Sussex; and Icklingham, Suffolk. Fragments of the one below, from Walesby, Lincolnshire, depict evocative scenes of baptism with 3 groups of figures, each with a catechumen assisted by two supporters.



Mark explained that identifying church buildings from this period is problematic, not least because the most common form was the basilica, a building type used for many purposes. Hence, identification is based on assessing several factors such as east-west orientation, presence of an apse, possibly a narthex, artefacts with Christian symbols and a nearby baptismal font. A good example is a small basilica to the south-east of the main forum in Silchester, with two aisles, an apse at the west end and a narthex to the east; a nearby soak-away may have been associated with a baptistery. Another strong candidate is under the medieval parish church of St Paul-in-the-Bail, Lincoln, near the Roman forum. Under it was a rectangular building aligned east-west with a potential rectangular apse at the eastern end then, above that, a larger timber structure with a substantial eastern apse. There are a number of other potential examples such as the apsidal building near the Romano-British cemetery at Butt Road, Colchester, and the Roman building beneath the medieval church of St Mary-de-Lode, Gloucester.

There are also a number of buildings outside towns that were possible churches, the most likely being a small rectangular structure with an apse and a nearby R-B cemetery at Icklingham, Suffolk. There are also several converted Romano-Celtic temples such as at Ivy Chimneys, Witham, with a nearby brick-built baptismal font. St Albans has a possible church converted from a temple in front of the theatre.

There is evidence suggesting a number of Roman villas were used as 'house churches ', when part of the villa was dedicated to the worship of Christ. The best example is Lullingstone, Kent, where exceptional preservation has allowed a series of plaster wall-paintings to be reconstructed. The ante-room, or narthex, feature a Chi-rho flanked by alpha and omega (first and last letters of the Greek alphabet). Other symbols were also used, such as a sequence of figures in the orans posture (arms extended and hands raised up), the position associated with prayer in the early church. A number of villas have produced mosaics that incorporate possible Christian symbolism. The best known is the central roundel of a mosaic from Hinton St Mary, Dorset, which shows a male head with a Chi-rho symbol behind it. The Chi-rho also appears on

another Dorset mosaic at Frampton, where it decorates an apse. It is quite possible that villa bathhouses would have been adopted for baptisms. Mark also mentioned the villa at Bradford-on-Avon which he excavated in 2002-03, finding that the mosaic in the dining room had been cut by a circular feature interpreted as a Christian baptistery.

There are a number of cemeteries that are considered Christian, with the graves having an east-west alignment and sharing an absence of personal items. One of the most impressive is Poundbury, outside Dorchester, containing the remains of *c.*1400 inhumations dating mainly between the 4th and 5th century. However, because of the absence of grave goods, dating of Christian burials can be difficult.

Finally, there is a growing recognition of Christian structures found within military sites. On the northern frontier, Mark described some of the latest findings from Vindolanda. As we learned from the recent talk by Andrew Birley (see EDAS Bulletin November 2020) there are many signs of Christianity within the fort, including burial stones with Christian inscriptions. A simple building with an apsidal end was constructed within the courtyard of the *praetorium*, dated to the early 5th century. There is an associated large tank of a size suitable for full-immersion baptisms. A stunning artefact was, as covered in the Bulletin, recovered recently from Vindolanda in a building now understood to be the remains of a 6th century church. Fourteen fragments of thin lead sheet are the fragile remains of a very rare Christian cup or chalice, covered by lightly etched symbols, each representing different forms of Christian iconography typical of the period, including crosses and Chi-rho motifs, fish, ships, a whale, angels, a bishop, members of a congregation, and letters in the Latin and Greek alphabets. The combination of so many of these etchings and the context of the discovery makes this artefact one of the most important of its type to come from early Christianity in Western Europe. It is the only surviving chalice from this period in Britain. The compelling evidence now being assembled suggests that by the 6th century Vindolanda had become a defended monastic community.

At nearby Housesteads Fort there is also evidence of a small apsidal building that could have been a church, and next to it is a small stone-lined tank suitable for baptisms. At Arbeia, the major fort and supply base located at the mouth of the Tyne, there is a putative church within the *principia* with a possible altar. Several of the Roman sites along the length of Hadrian's Wall have yet to be fully examined and it is possible that further evidence will be found. Another possible example in a military context is the rectangular structure at the Roman fort at Richborough, Kent, located in the north-east corner, its purpose suggested by the nearby hexagonal masonry structure which is recognised as a font.

Although there is limited evidence of Christianity in Roman Britain before Constantine, it is clear that by the late 3rd century the church had become established. It grew in importance, certainly with the Romano-British elite, throughout the 4th century. In the post-Roman period the church continued, but it was forced westwards as the pagan Anglo-Saxons took control of the east of the country. Although contact with the Roman Church was limited, the existence of the British/Celtic Church was known. In AD 596 Augustine (regarded as the founder of the English Church) was sent to Britain by Pope Gregory I. His main objective was conversion of the pagans, but he was also tasked with reasserting papal authority over the native church. Augustine did meet with the British bishops, possibly at Cirencester, but he failed with this task and it would be a few more years before Rome was able to assert its authority.

For those who may want to investigate further, Mark mentioned two important works on the subject: *Christianity in Roman Britain to AD 500* by Charles Thomas (1981), and *Christianity in Roman Britain* by David Petts (2003).

Andrew Morgan

Italica – the great Roman city you may never have heard about

Italica, in Spain, was once one of the great cities of Roman Baetica but seems little known now, perhaps because the only significant structure rising much above the ground is the amphitheatre. It was amongst the 5 largest in the Roman Empire, seating about 25,000 people (half as many as the Colosseum in Rome) – rather more than the estimated population, so that it must have served the countryside well beyond the city, and perhaps even nearby Seville (*Hispalis*). Its other claim to fame was as the birthplace of Trajan (ruled 98-117), the first emperor from outside Italy, and of his successor, Hadrian (117-138).

Italica is only about 10km from the centre of Seville, near and partly under the small town of Santiponce. A bus from the Plaza de Armas bus station will take you to the gates, or there are guided coach tours at €30 – but they take 4 hours, include a medieval monastery that didn't sound all that great as well as a wine cellar (read 'tourist trap'). As our hotel was on the other side of the city from the bus station, we took a taxi at €25 return and €20 waiting time (about 70 minutes) – a reasonable cost, especially if shared by 4. Entrance in 2017 was just €2.

And what is there to see? Well, at first sight not a lot beyond the amphitheatre, facing you as you enter the site but rather damaged. We went there last and this photo is from the internet as it was raining for much of our visit. Any with sunshine or shadows aren't my photos, and the next one of the Cardo Maximus (main street) gives an idea of the conditions that day. There was just one other British couple there and a small Spanish tour group.

There was an Iberian settlement of the Turdetan tribe at Santiponce from the 5th century BC, where the Roman general Scipio Africanus left wounded soldiers after a nearby battle of the Second Punic War in 206 BC. Rome then took control of the Carthaginian areas, but it was another two centuries before they controlled the whole of Hispania. Roman culture prevailed more quickly here, so much so that the city became a *municipium* by the mid-1st century BC (a relatively high legal status in the Roman hierarchy of settlement, which it is thought Dorchester achieved). Within half a century or so monumental buildings had been erected, such as baths and a theatre, the latter now over restored and apparently partially visible at the far side of Santiponce, though closed to the public when we went.

The city clearly gained wealth and importance over the 1st century AD, since leading Italican families started to appear in the senate at Rome, leading up to the accession of Trajan. New urban development beyond the old town (now mostly under Santiponce) came in the first half of the 2nd century, when its status was upgraded to *colonia*: Colonia Aelia Augusta Italica. The new, large *insulae* within wide, colonnaded streets are marked out on much of the site but now (at least) mostly unpaved. Large, new public buildings included the amphitheatre, and Hadrian erected a huge temple to Trajan, the Traianeum, though my photo of what is left looks like no more than a series of overgrown WWI trenches.

The remains of the main public baths from this period are a little clearer, but we were beginning to think there really wasn't a great deal more to see…. until we turned the corner into what had probably been

the wealthiest quarter of the city. Here were large courtyard houses, some slightly restored to show their layout and garden areas, with many mosaics, consolidated and open to the elements. The best ones, and other finds, are now in the Archaeological Museum in Seville, but we ran out of time and didn't get there. All the same, their quality is clear from the small selection shown here, and you can 'spot the swastikas' as I did – the ancient symbol of good luck which is the theme of the best preserved mosaic at Druce Farm Roman Villa.






The amphitheatre, as I've said, is the largest remaining monument despite the damage it has suffered (it featured in Game of Thrones season 7). It's clearly nothing like as well preserved as those in Nîmes, or even Arles, in France, though I think still gives a good impression of monumentality. The cells and tunnels where the animals and gladiators were held are now open to the air but sadly, like the seating banks, inaccessible.

We found the small museum and exhibition room near the exit interesting as, unlike at most sites, it particularly attempts to explain how this once great city came to be what we see today. The ravages of time and robbing are clearly central, but the displays aim to fill out the story. In fact, the city was declining even before the fall of the Western Roman Empire. Italican families lost influence in Rome in the 3rd century and the River Guadalquivir silted and changed course, taking away the vital port.

There are signs of buildings being abandoned from the 3rd century and colonnades being taken over by small structures. A little later, the original walled area (red on photo below) was reduced (yellow).

As an indication of scale, the amphitheatre at the top is 154m across, and the original 'old town' now under Santiponce is clear at bottom right.

The Visigoths, who sacked Rome in 410, ruled much of the Iberian peninsula for the next 3 centuries. They became Christians in the late 5th century, built churches and destroyed pagan buildings. What appear to be Roman columns are visible in Seville's cathedrals and churches, with many in Cordoba's great mosque, La Mezquita. The growing importance of nearby Seville also contributed to the robbing of building material, as did work on the walls during a Visigothic civil war in 583. Yet Italica remained of some importance and had its own bishop. There is still a small church and walled cemetery on the site (just north of the centre of the yellow dashes).

We know few specifics of robbing materials for several hundred years and Arabic writings from the Moorish period (from the 8th century) refer to "a city now in ruins". As the 'Reconquista' progressed, and Catholic Spain pushed the Moors back, a Cistercian monastery was founded nearby in 1301. Although some monks recorded parts of the remains, they mostly used the ruins for their own buildings or sold off materials. As elsewhere, limestone was used for agriculture or making cement, and it seems that the monastery may well have been the greatest single cause of destruction.

Santiponce was previously alongside the river nearer to Seville but moved here to avoid flooding in 1603, contributing greatly to further destruction of the ruins. There was, of course, no protection for ancient remains and officialdom could be the worst culprits, e.g. the outer walls of the amphitheatre were destroyed in 1740 to build a dam. Some protection came in 1810 under the Napoleonic occupation with a budget for regular excavation, but private excavation and, effectively, looting continued. It wasn't until 1912 that laws regulating excavation came into force and even that doesn't seem to have been successful for several years: the photograph shows a mosaic being uncovered in a private excavation in June 1914, after which it was removed to a palace in Seville.

Despite the loss of so much, I'd definitely recommend a visit to Italica if you're ever in Seville, well worth several days itself. Perhaps you'll make it to the Archaeology Museum in the beautiful Parque de Maria Luisa, occupying one of the buildings left from the planned Spanish Americas Fair that was rather scuppered by the Wall Street Crash.

Geoff Taylor

2020 Dorset Proceedings - vol. 141

We receive a copy of the Proceedings and have recently had this volume. As always, I'd be happy to lend the journal to any member who would like to read it – let me know and we can find a way to get it to you. If you're interested in just one article, I could perhaps scan and email to you.

In summary, volume 141 has the following archaeological/historical items:

- The first 20 years of PAS in Dorset (15 pages)
- Poole Harbour: known late prehistoric-medieval archaeology and future research directions (27)
- The burnt mound at Seatown, Chideock (32)
- A re-examination of Clandon Barrow by geophysical and topographical survey (14)
- Preliminary investigations of more round barrow cemetery arrangements (16)
- Rethinking the Roman legionary fortress at Lake Farm, Wimborne (10)
- Evaluation of late prehistoric and R-B occupation at Townsend Farm, Poyntington (11)
- A later Bronze Age globular urn from Woodsford, Dorchester (2)
- Dorset Archaeology in 2019 (a round-up) (2)

Web Link Highlight December 2020

A bumper crop of weblinks this month – and an eclectic mix that should include something for everyone to lighten these dark days. There are many that piqued my interest, such as the local stories of gold coins found in a New Forest garden, or the medieval Chinese coin in a Hampshire garden and, of course, the discovery of a new dinosaur by Steve Etches (if you have not been yet, his museum at Kimmeridge is a gem). Then there are some that seem to be 'tourist bait' as they mainly talk about discoveries made years ago, but with a minimal update - see the Pompeii 'fast food shop', or Aztec wall of skulls, or the announcement from Egypt that Saqqarra has much more to reveal. I am not sure how many will be brave enough to plan foreign holidays yet, but I suspect that is why these items have appeared now, as it has become traditional for holiday adverts to appear as soon as the Christmas adverts are finished. It is a shame that the powers that be in Dorset do not seem to see archaeology in the same light: a powerful asset to one of its major industries – tourism.

Some of you may wonder how I choose the sources for the weblinks. There is no science to it, just those items I happen to come across in my browsing. However, there are some outlets I try to avoid. Amongst the 'print media' sites I favour the Guardian and Independent, not for any other reason than they cover most of the stories and their websites are not plastered with garish links to sensational stories elsewhere on their site. This is why I try to avoid The Sun, Mirror, Daily Express and Daily Mail. The Telegraph site only allows you to read the whole item if you subscribe and The Times does not seem to include much of interest. The other 'breed' of site to avoid are the 'click bait' sites – tedious to view and not much that has not been covered elsewhere with infinitely more gravitas.

Alan Dedden

December Weblinks

[I've not heard that editing the links last month caused any problems, so that will be the approach now.]

- **Was Robert Of Wetherby The Real Robin Hood?** HERE
- **Treasure To Be Redefined** HERE
- **Viking Longship Excavation In Norway** HERE
- **Enigma Machine Recovered By Divers To Be Restored** HERE
- **Newton's Papers On Attempts To Unravel The Secrets Of The Pyramids Auctioned** HERE
- **Hoard Of Gold Coins Found In New Forest Garden** HERE
- **Prehistoric Sea Dragon Found On Jurassic Coast By Dr Steve Ecthes** HERE
- **Saxon Era Mosaic Found At Chedworth Roman Villa** HERE
- **More Skulls Revealed At Mexico City Aztec Tower** HERE
- **Did The Ancient Egyptians Invent Counterfeit Money?** HERE
- **Anglo Saxon Cross Found With Galloway Hoard Restored** HERE
- **£1m For Conservation And Investigation Of Galloway Hoard Granted** HERE
- **Researchers Digitally Reconstruct The Brain Of An Early Dinosaur** HERE
- **Roman Baths Uncovered In Amman** HERE
- **Great Pyramid Relic Found In University Of Aberdeen Museum By Egyptian Archaeologist** HERE
- **French Metal Detectorist Accused Of Looting On Vast Scale** HERE
- **Mystery Of 'Butter Boat' Shipwreck Solved 250 Years After Sinking** HERE
- **'Cretaceous Pompeii' Fossils May Not Be What They Seem** HERE
- **Madagascan 'Crazy Beast' Broke Rules Of Evolution** HERE
- **Prince Charles Reveals Fascination With Archaeology During Museum Visit** HERE

- **Evidence Of Possible Roman Reprisals For Boudicca Revolt** HERE
- **How Paupers Navigated The Poor Law To Get Aid 200 Years Ago** HERE
- **Early Humans May Have Hibernated Through Harsh Winters** HERE
- **Mummified Wolf Cub Lived 56,000 Years Ago** HERE
- **Analysis Of Carved Bone Weapons From Doggerland Finds Some Made From Human Bone** HERE
- **Much More To Come From Saqqara Say Egyptian Archaeologists** HERE
- **The Mystery Of Thomas Becket's 'Little Book'** HERE
- **Pompeii Fast Food Shop Fully Excavated** HERE
- **Desecrated Effigy Lost For Centuries Restored** HERE
- **Ice Age Woolly Rhino Found In Melting Siberian Permafrost** HERE
- **Scientific Analysis Confirms Authenticity Of Rorke's Drift VC** HERE
- **Medieval Chinese Coin Found In Hampshire Garden May Be Genuine** HERE
- **The True (Daily Mail Version) Story Of The Sutton Hoo Discovery** HERE
- **Archaeologist Who Discovered Oldest City In Americas Gets Death Threats From Squatters** HERE

We'd really like you to send your weblinks to Alan at alan.dedden@gmail.com

You may be interested in: **Colchester Archaeology Talks**

The *'Roman Life'* series of talks from Richard Bale explores different aspects of living in Roman times using archaeological and historical evidence. Each talk seeks to reveal the how's and why's of a topic, so that we can understand both the similarities and differences with our Roman ancestors.
Each talk is presented via Zoom and lasts around 45 minutes, with Richard being available to answer your questions. Tickets are priced at £4.75 from the website: www.thecolchesterarchaeologist.co.uk

The 2021 programme will commence on Thursday 21 January at 19:30: 'Roman Life – Dining'
The Romans typically ate three meals daily, with dinner considered the most important meal. Remains of ingredients have survived, along with recipes on how to prepare them. It also allowed an important social occasion -the dinner party. This exercised the social institution of patronage; allowed the host to show off the best tableware and mosaics; and to surprise the guests with the selection of food and wine on offer.

Another chance to see the self-confessed 'pot-aholic'

If you missed it the first-time round, there is another opportunity to see Julian Richard's excellent virtual gallery tour of the **'Potted History of Britain'** exhibition at the Museum of East Dorset.

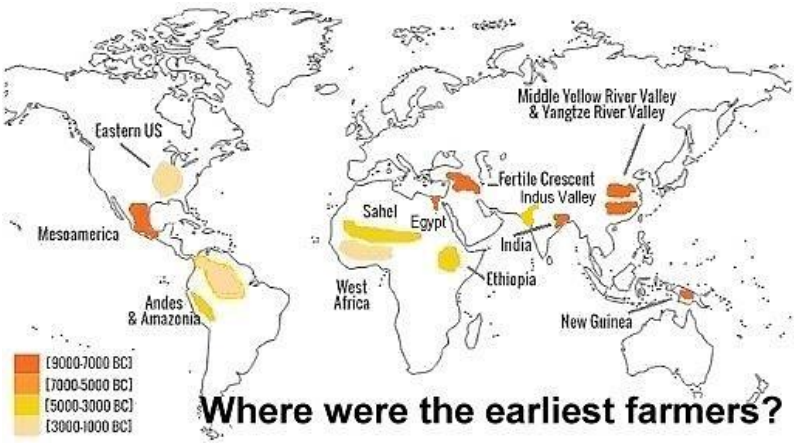
Julian offers his insights around the origin and meanings of the exhibits, which chart 6,000 years of ceramics, exploring pottery's role in everyday life from prehistoric times to today.

The pots on display include some from the museum's own stores, highlighting their unique collection of East Dorset 'Verwood' pottery, while others have been generously loaned by Salisbury Museum. In all, over 80 pots, ranging from 6,000-year-old fragments excavated near Stonehenge to a pot made during the Spring lockdown, will be used to tell this fascinating story.

People who sign up to join the virtual exhibition will receive a link to the event, which will be streamed again on YouTube at 7:30pm on Thursday 14th January. Tickets cost £5 and are available from the Museum of East Dorset website.
https://museumofeastdorset.co.uk/project/the-potted-history-of-britain-additional-date/

The Advent of Agriculture

And so we enter the Neolithic era at some stage between 9000 and 8000 BCE. But for all the hype about the agricultural revolution it wasn't really a revolution at all, more a transition over many millennia, developed independently in several regions (but not all of those on the map).



Farming probably arose as a means of feeding the animals kept by the people rather than feeding people themselves. It seems clear now that pastoralism as a way of life usually preceded farming. People had had a diet of meat and had gathered fruit and vegetables since time immemorial, so why eat grain? Cereals initially would have been anathema to the people but the animals relished them. The digestive systems of our forefathers would have taken some time to adjust to a cereal-based diet; it would not have come naturally.

Dogs, originally, a breed of wolf, would have been scavenging around human camps from Palaeolithic times, and would gradually have ingratiated themselves into the human world. In fact they would have been very useful companions to our forefathers in the hunt. Sheep and goats were probably in the process of domestication at the same time that Göbekli Tepe was being constructed; both animals would have provided a good supply of meat, wool and milk. The domestication of cattle would have followed very shortly after, but still prior to our forefathers' reliance on crops. As time went on, the domestication of cattle would have been life changing. In addition to hides, meat and milk, for the first time our forefathers would no longer have been wholly dependent on their own muscle power but could start to harness the not inconsiderable strength of cattle. Only at this point, in all probability, did agriculture begin to predominate.

The initial adoption of agriculture only took place in a very small part of the world around south-east Turkey, Syria and Iraq, not long after 9000 BCE, by people having the need to feed growing numbers of domestic animals, but it would have caused a paramount shift in Humankind's outlook. People now had to master time, the calendar and more intricate tooling. They had to perform a series of complex activities relating to sowing and planting with a view of something happening at a future date, i.e. a successful harvest; quite an alien concept for previously nomadic people. A mystical solidarity between man and vegetation substituted Humankind's supernatural relationship with the natural world. The emphasis shifted from the sky to the earth.

Initially it was probably women who were the predominant agriculturalists. At the dawn of agriculture men and women may still have been equals, indeed women may even have had the edge for a while, but unfortunately not for long. Before women became well and truly bogged down with childbirth and child rearing, they would probably have played the main role in the domestication of plants while their menfolk were still out hunting. The fertility of the earth would have become bound up with feminine fecundity; it was women who knew the mysteries of creation birth, death and rebirth!

Mother Earth became 'The Goddess', and female sexuality may have become synonymous with the

The so-called 'Mother Goddess' from Çatalhöyük *c.*6000 BCE.

enigma of the harvest and the planting of seeds. However, if this was the case regrettably it did not last long. Although it is clear that agriculture has underwritten most of subsequent human endeavour, there were evolutionary tragedies in our forefathers' adoption of agriculture. Once our forebears settled down in villages, the perception grew very quickly that the more children to help in fields the better, borne out both by burial evidence and comparison with modern agricultural subsistence cultures. Women's lives probably became shorter and dominated by child birth and child rearing. The lot of women may only now be starting to recuperate, but still, regrettably, not everywhere.

A further tragedy is that people generally would have had a much more limited calorific, vitamin and protein intake than their hunter gatherer ancestors. Less animal protein and, in all probability, less vegetable varieties were available for consumption, except for the favoured few. And now our forefathers were stuck in their villages, dependent upon the vagaries of the weather and vulnerable to the spread of disease, among themselves and potentially their animals and crops. In hard times Palaeolithic peoples could move on, but this was far more difficult for our settled forefathers.

From burial remains it does appear that people of this period were up to six inches shorter, appreciably smaller than their hunter gatherer ancestors. Infant mortality would have been very high indeed; in all probability for the large majority life may have been rather more miserable than in earlier times. The adoption of agriculture was certainly not the panacea it is sometimes made out to have been.

And this shift from hunting and gathering to farming would have brought about profound changes in the relationship between the living and the dead. A migratory lifestyle demands that the dead be buried where they fell. Once our forefathers adopted a sedentary lifestyle burial could, and did, take place in the permanent vicinity of the living, quite commonly in the floors of the people's houses. This may have been a means of controlling the dead: the dead were perceived as wandering in a world comprising both good and evil spirits, so it was incumbent on the living to look after the dead through constant vigilance. And burial in your own house would have reinforced notions of ownership and hereditary rights: my house was mine because it contained my family's ancestors, whose memory would be constantly in mind because of the proximity of their remains.

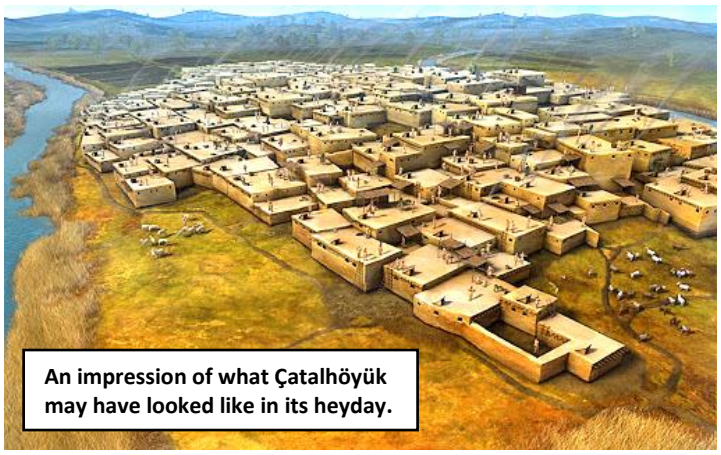
Statuette from Ain Ghazal a town from *c.*6500 BCE near modern day Amman, Jordan. Are they seeing something in the supernatural world?

Increasingly the spirits took on human characteristics. Humankind would wish to make the heavenly realm reflect the earthly realm, but as an idealised version of what it is thought it could or should be. People started to construct deities around the supernatural spirits based on the only thing that they could really know, themselves. People need food, so people offered the deities sacrifices; people need shelter so they build temples for the deities; the deities acquire personalities and histories.

Is it this conceptualisation of anthropomorphic gods that pushes Humankind into the Neolithic, giving humans the incentive to alter the Earth by exploiting agriculture? Or was it the other way round, i.e. once agriculture developed, Humankind began to humanise the gods? Personally I think that it was more of the latter than the former. With agriculture, people considered that they had some control over nature and the old spirits of nature became less significant; as we were now taking control, our gods became more like us.

Çatalhöyük, a town in central Turkey flourishing from about 7000 BCE, may have had a population of up to 5,000. This was probably the world's first truly urban area supported by surrounding farmlands, though it appears that the size and wealth of the town was probably down to trade. Death and burials were clearly a major pre-occupation for the people of Çatalhöyük. Most of the houses that have so far been excavated in the town have up to 8 burials in the floor and some have far more (it seems that the record so far is 64!). Many shrines have been excavated here featuring, among other things, what appear to be depictions of death and skulls. There also seems to have been an obsession with bulls, whether as the centre of some form of fertility cult or a reminder of the hunt is unclear, possibly both.

Burial beneath a house in Çatalhöyük.



An impression of what Çatalhöyük may have looked like in its heyday.

We are approaching the era of 'Big Gods', created in man's image, but for the Big Gods to emerge there needed first to be a critical mass of people. It appears that, despite the growth of towns, general population levels did not really increase a great deal in the period 10000-5000 BCE. However, population levels did increase rapidly between 5000-0 BCE (some estimates put it at up to 20 fold for the period). As already intimated, it is probably only at this stage, around 5000 BCE, that agriculture really took off as the main occupation of those peoples who had or were settling down in towns and villages.

At a similar time, probably from 6000 BCE onwards, irrigation systems started to feature along with two other major innovations. These innovations, ovens and pottery, would have had considerable influence on, and would have encouraged, urban living. Although cooking with fire had been around since time immemorial, and there is clear evidence of forms of subterranean ovens in the Natufian and possibly even earlier cultures, enclosed ovens above ground seem to have started to be developed from around this time. They would have greatly encouraged the consumption of cereals by allowing cooking, and baking, at far higher temperatures. Again, although there is evidence of ceramics from earlier periods, these were mostly small scale and decorative. Large pots, as with ovens, were clearly not appropriate for predominantly nomadic peoples, but once people settled techniques of ceramic manufacture improved, although it is not thought that the potter's wheel came in until after 5000 BCE. Large pots for storage, especially of water and foodstuffs, would have become prerequisites in any self-respecting home.

From 5000 BCE the era of the critical mass of people necessary for the advent of Big Gods was coming. People in towns established a hierarchy among themselves and a corresponding hierarchy would have been established among the spirits. The first gods may simply have been higher ranking ancestral spirits. As the towns grew, life in them became more stratified, and, as intimated above, what happens on Earth is reflected in the heavens. The consequent rise in populations in these towns, along with the increasing complexity of social organisation, would have led to a perception of a corresponding increase in complexity in the heavens – the advent of numerous anthropomorphic gods.

The Sumerian god Enki, called 'Ea' in Akkadia, the god of creation and referred to in texts as "Lord of the Earth". The statue is from *c*.2000 BCE, but there are texts referring to him 500 years earlier and archaeological evidence of his shrines over 2,000 years before that.

This Neolithic cultural revolution saw a deliberate attempt by people to align human society with the cosmos, not simply to acknowledge and honour the cosmos as previously but to harness the energy of the cosmos. For the first time there was tacit acknowledgement that Humankind had some (limited) control over the cosmos, and that a relationship with the powerful and increasingly anthropomorphic forces that controlled the cosmos could be beneficial.

In my next article we enter into the era of 'civilisation', Big Gods and Big Kings, as Humankind moves inexorably to a greater understanding of its own existence and to various diverse means of explaining this existence.

Neil Meldrum

View from Above No 33: Gussage Down

Photos by Sue Newman and Jo Crane

Taken late on a winter's day. the low light of the main photograph above, looking westwards, shows up the many archaeological features that straddle Gussage Down.

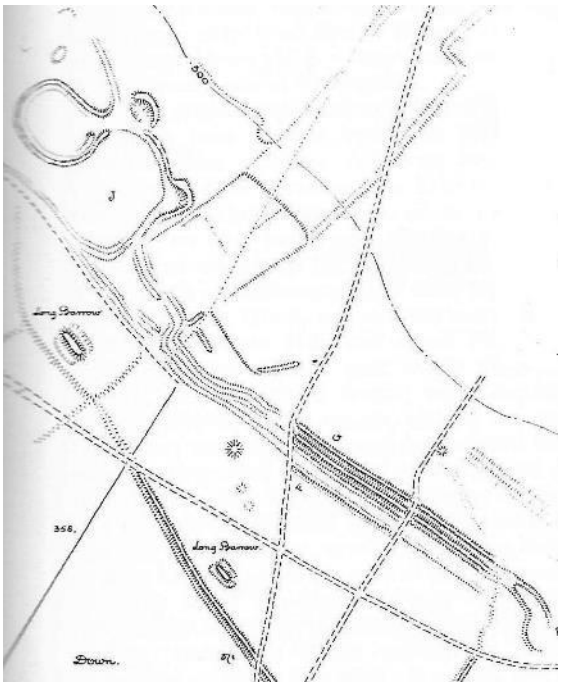
Ackling Dyke runs across the top of the photo passing by several features, including a large Bronze Age disc barrow. Towards the right hand side there are the two faint trails of the Dorset Cursus straddling the nearer of two long barrows near the peak of the down. In fact, if you follow the line of the long barrows upwards to the short line of a bank, the 'trig' point marking the highest point of the down is just off the photograph. Two more barrows are also visible, one between and to the left of the long barrow and a smaller one less obvious beyond the linear ditch.

Towards the centre are the outlines of an Iron Age settlement with four or five enclosures, thought to be the largest of its type in Wessex. A 'banjo enclosure' can be seen in the aerial photograph, more clearly shown in the maps below. English Heritage's information on them says that such enclosures are rarely visible now except as crop marks. Where fieldwork has been done, they are all Middle to Late Iron Age, *c*.400 BC to AD 43. They are generally 0.2-0.5 hectares in size, with a few approaching 1 hectare (2.5 acres), and are usually associated with linear boundaries, as here. There is some evidence that they may be the ditches around high status dwellings.

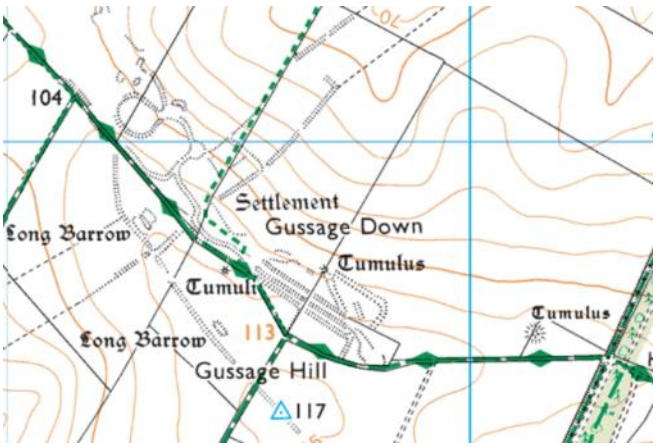
This smaller aerial photograph was taken in August, clearly around harvest time, and shows the difference in terms of the visibility of different features.

Colt Hoare was the first to record the well-preserved earthworks here, in the early part of the 19th century, and was particularly struck by them as "one of the most interesting relics of antiquity". Charles Warne showed a plan of them in his *Ancient Dorset* in 1872. Both thought the settlement was Roman *Vindocladia*, which we now believe is at Shapwick.

A century ago some of the features were still clearly visible, as can be seen on the plan below from Heywood Sumner's *Cranborne Chase* of 1913 (Plate XLIV). He calls the central feature a 'British Settlement'. They remained clearly upstanding in an aerial photograph from *Wessex from the Air*, published in 1928. Sadly, though, most of the remains succumbed to the plough during WWII.



A recent Ordnance Survey map still shows some of the features, though you would be hard pressed to find many on the ground. Of course, the ditches and banks to the north of the trig point do survive, as can be seen in the main aerial photograph.



Geoff Taylor/Jo Crane

REMEMBERING THE ROMANS X

All the evidence suggests that the Roman 'civilisation' brought little benefit to people's well-being: generally poor nutrition except for the affluent, ineffective or downright dangerous medicine, lead poisoning and very poor sanitary standards; even the much lauded baths were actually disease factories. The crowding of people into towns and cities facilitated disease taking hold, and good roads helped to spread it; in fact, epidemics and plagues are commonly reported in the annals. The Antonine Plague starting in AD 165 was Empire-wide and may have killed a fifth of the population.

As I said before, though, even without modern hygiene and medical knowledge, some Romans could reach advanced ages, even if that was a small proportion of the numbers today. Galen put the maximum age at 117 (Aelius Galenus was a Greek who lived in the Roman Empire during the 2nd century AD and is considered the best medical researcher of antiquity). There is no information as to how Galen got this figure, but it is surprisingly close to the current limits:

- The oldest independently verified male age is 116 years & 54 days for Kane Tanaka of Japan.
- For women it's 122 years & 164 days for Jeanne Calment of France; 9 other women are known to have lived longer than Kane Tanaka.

Many researchers have stated that age exaggeration for older people was a strong feature of the Roman Empire. Even Pliny the Elder reported that the AD 73 census in *Regio* VIII (Aemilia) showed 81 people over 100, 3 of whom said they were 140 (it seems Pliny may have believed them). Evidence for this exaggeration is partly shown in the unusually spaced epitaph of Quintus - his age of 105 years reflects a common tendency for ages to be reported as multiples of 5. Rounding up like this then leads to exaggeration, which tends to increase with increasing age – a fictitious longevity.

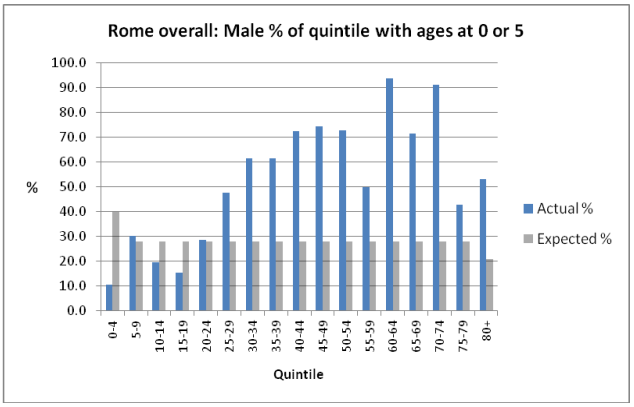
D · M
Q · QVINTO · EVTYCHETI
QVINTI · EVTYCHIANVS · ET
· VICTORIA · EX · TESTAMEN
TV · FECERVNT ·
NVTRITORI · SVO
VIXIT·ANN· CV· M· V· D· XVII

Epitaph of Quintus Quintus Eutychetius set up in accordance with his will by his nurses(?). He is stated to have lived 105 years, 5 months and 17 days. CIL 5.7188 XI

This sort of rounding and exaggeration isn't just an ancient phenomenon, e.g. 58% of adults in the 1945 Turkish census gave an age that was a multiple of 5. Whilst it tends to be more common in developing countries and where illiteracy is high, such exaggeration is seen in almost every society. An unusual version of it was seen in Egyptian papyri, where the landowner Aurelius Isidorus gave his age as 40 both in August 308 and June 309, but 45 at some time between the two dates.

In the Cisalpine Gaul epitaphs there were 15 people stated to be 70 or over, the oldest (above) at 105, with 13 of them reporting an age divisible by 5 (87%). The people in Northern Peninsular Italy were, perhaps, less prone to exaggeration, with the oldest one said to be 100 and 41 of the 64 aged 70 or more giving ages as multiples of 5 (64%). In Rome, 8 people were 100 or more, with the oldest stated as 113; 215 of the 309 aged 70 or more had ages divisible by 5 (70%).

In fact, the graph shows that rounding and likely exaggeration starts quite young, here from about 25 (the expected percentage in each quintile or 5 year group is over 20%, since the plausible Roman mortality table gives more dying at the youngest age which is, of course, divisible by 5).



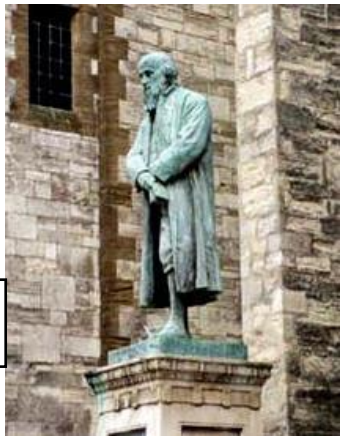
The next article will look at one epitaph that seems to bring together much that I've said about people's knowledge of their ages.

Geoff Taylor

--------oooooooooooooooooooooooooooo--------

An extract from *A British Earthwork* by Rev. William Barnes

William Barnes (1801-1886) is perhaps best known as a writer of Dorset dialect poetry though, as here, he also wrote in standard English. He helped to found the Dorset County Museum and the Dorset Natural History and Antiquarian Field Club, this poem about an Iron Age hillfort appearing in the first issue of the Proceedings in 1877.



Statue of William Barnes outside St Peter's Church, Dorchester.

Their breastworks now are fallen,
And their banks are sunken low;
The gateway yawns ungated,
And unsought by friend or foe.
No war-horn calls for warriors,

And no clear-eyed watchmen spy
For tokens of the foe, around
The quarters of the sky.

No band, with shout and singing,
Sally forth with spear and sword,
Staying foes at wood or hill,
Or at the waded river ford;
Or else to take the hill, and fight
To win, or die within.

For the full poem see this link, or the article considering this portrayal of an archaeological site as a means of looking at the relationship between language, landscape and its people through time:

Blackmore, J. 2019. Language in the Landscape: an excavation of William Barnes' A British Earthwork. *Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society* 140: 42-52.

EDAS 2021 PROGRAMME

Subject to coronavirus restrictions lectures will one day be from 7:30 – 9:30 pm at St Catherine's Church Hall, Lewens Lane, Wimborne, BH21 1LE. Meanwhile, at 7:30 on a device near you.

http://www.dorset-archaeology.org.uk/programme.html

Wed 13th January	Zoom Lecture	**Sophy Charlton**	Finding Mesolithic Britain: Biomolecular Approaches to Hunter-Gatherer Archaeology
Wed 10th February	Zoom Lecture	**Paul Cheetham**	300 Miles in the Footsteps of Vespasian – Lake Farm Roman legionary fortress
Wed 10th March	Zoom Meeting	**AGM and members' talk**	Keeper's Lodge – Andrew Morgan and Lilian Ladle
Wed 14th April	Zoom Lecture	**Mike Allen**	The Prehistoric Chalkland Landscape of Stonehenge, Avebury and Dorchester - tearing up the textbooks and starting again
Wed 12th May	Zoom Lecture	**Julian Richards**	Shaftesbury - Alfred's Town, Alfred's Abbey
EVENTS TO BE RESCHEDULED			
tbd	Tour	**Devizes Museum**	Led by museum director David Dawson
tbd	Walk	**Cranborne Chase**	9 mile walk from Martin Green's farm looking at the history of the Chase, led by Alan Dedden
tbd	Day trip	**London - Sir John Soane's Museum and the Museum of London (tbc)**	Coach trip to visit two of London's Museums

DISTRICT DIARY

Your information is very welcome, especially now when this section is completely empty – do let me know of any events.

ALL EVENTS ARE SUBJECT TO CORONAVIRUS RESTRICTIONS THEN IN FORCE
(Local societies may have events, but they're not generally advertised beyond members)