



East Dorset Antiquarian Society

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Founded 1983

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NEWSLETTER – Midsummer 2026

Dear EDAS members,

As mentioned previously, we were struggling to finalise all the details of the coming season's lectures but, thanks to Alan and the organisers, that has all come together now. The next meeting, on 9th September, will have a highly recommended talk by Cindy Wood on 'Medieval women and how to find them'. Further details will be in the September newsletter but, meanwhile, the full list of talks is at the end in the **EDAS Programme**. The **District Diary** is starting to fill with lectures after the summer recess.

Many thanks to Vanessa for the summary of our latest honorary member, Miles Russell's, interesting lecture at our May meeting: **Piltdown Man: Adventures in Archaeological Forgery**.

I'm also pleased to add another item from Vanessa on a new exhibition at the Museum of East Dorset: **What's the story behind an object that's important to you?** But Vanessa isn't the only person with more than one article in this newsletter, and I'm grateful to both Phil D'Eath and Alan Dedden for their contributions, all going to make this a rather longer newsletter than usual. You might have figured by now that I'm not necessarily listing titles here in the order they appear, chosen for how they best fit.

Alan has sent a bumper list in **Weblinks No. 88**, together with the **Weblink Highlights**. He's also added links to two interesting articles from the Ness of Brodgar Project, separate as they're not as new as the weblinks: **A Neolithic Pottery Puzzle**. Something he wanted to get off his chest is revealed in the article **Online Nonsense** – a reminder, if one was needed, not to believe what you read on the internet without checking (or any information people are using to 'sell' you a story).

With grateful thanks to all those who propose and organise events for our members, I also have to thank Phil for several items that summarise and record them. He provided both the summary and photos in **2026 visit to Bournemouth University's 'Big Dig'**, which we're grateful to Lilian Ladle and Karen Brown for organising. Thanks also to Phil for his note on the **Trip to 'The Newt', Somerset**, and to both him and Karen Brown for providing photos. Not content with those, Phil also sent the summary and photographs of the events kindly run by Janet and Gordon Bartlett recently: **Guided tours of Cerne Abbas**.

And Phil put together a comprehensive handout for the EDAS visit to Minchington in September 2025, with thanks to Simon and Denise Meaden for their excellent hosting of the event. That's reproduced here as **The Archaeology of Myncen and Goldfields Farms**, marking 30 years since the start of our excavations and 25 since they finished. Andrew Morgan and, more recently, Phil and myself have put considerable efforts with the site director into trying to get the work published. It does now seem to be coming together, if fairly slowly.

A brief article on survey work at St Mary's Church, Lytchett Matravers was in the last newsletter. Now we have **More from Lytchett Matravers**, with thanks to the authors, which explains Electrical Resistance Tomography more comprehensively and gives the survey results. There's also more background and information on the plans for the future.

And finally, there's **Viking funerals and burials 2**, completing the article in the last newsletter.

Geoff Taylor

Piltdown Man: Adventures in Archaeological Forgery

EDAS lecture by Miles Russell

In his highly entertaining and enlightening talk, Miles discussed how Piltdown Man was the culmination of many hoaxes perpetrated on the scientific community by Charles Dawson during his lifetime.

In 1912 Charles Dawson, an amateur antiquarian, claimed to have discovered the 'Missing Link' between ape and man in a gravel pit in Piltdown, Sussex. Dawson wrote to Arthur Smith Woodward, palaeontologist and Keeper of Geology at the Natural History Museum, about his find. The men started working together, making further discoveries at Barkham Manor until 1916. Finds included a set of teeth, a jawbone, more skull fragments and primitive tools, all of which they suggested belonged to the same individual. Nothing was recorded in context. Some finds were apparently brought to Dawson by unidentified labourers or in spoil heaps after sieving.

Dawson and Woodward hypothesised that the finds indicated evidence of a human ancestor living 500,000 years ago. They announced their discovery at a Geological Society meeting in 1912. For the most part, their story was accepted in good faith. When Charles Dawson died in 1916, Piltdown Man died with him. It took until 1949 for the findings to be officially queried and, on 21 November 1953, a team of English scientists dramatically exposed Piltdown Man as an audacious fake.

Miles believes that the outwardly genial and jolly "Dr Jekyll" persona of Charles Dawson masked a vindictive and vengeful "Mr Hyde". Unlike his brothers, Charles pursued a modest early career. He never went to university, opting instead to follow his father into the legal profession. As a solicitor, he did much to benefit his local community, where he was well respected. It is hard to believe that this is the same man accused of being the mastermind of the most infamous scientific fraud in history.



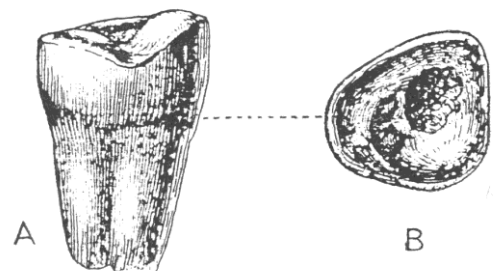
According to Miles, who has counted 38 hoaxes or dodgy finds made before Piltdown, Dawson was quite simply a serial forger. He had the MEANS (including a private lab in his home), the OPPORTUNITY (always in the right place at the right time; often the only person close to a 'discovery' or else acquainted with the person who had made the discovery) and the MOTIVE (he wanted to advance, be recognised and acclaimed in the scientific world). And, of course, he gained considerable recognition:

- In 1884, aged 20, he was Honorary Collector for the British Museum of Natural History, and in 1885 Dawson was elected a Fellow of the Geological Society.
- He was a founder of the Hastings and St Leonards Museum Association in 1889 and by January 1892 was included in the List of Officers at Sussex Archaeological Society.
- 1895 saw Dawson become a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, and a member of Uckfield Urban District Council in 1897.
- 1913 – 1916 he was put forward for Fellowship of the Royal Society

Dawson made uncannily fortunate and [in]credible findings during the 1880s and 1890s. Some of these are described below, but none are what they seemed. Was the man a compulsive liar? He certainly could 'spin' a good story.

SUSPECT: *Plagiaulax dawsoni*

Between 1880 and 1890, Dawson and Samuel Beckles FRS collected fossils from around Hastings. When Beckles died, Dawson catalogued and labelled Beckles' collection as it passed to the British Museum (Natural History). Amongst them he found teeth from a previously unknown species of mammal which, he claimed, was the first evidence of a European Cretaceous mammal: an important missing link in the history of life on earth, later named *Plagiaulax dawsoni* in his honour.



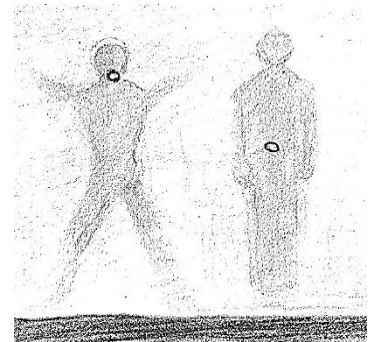
Dawson's sketch. Experts showed that the teeth had been artificially worn down to create the mammalian wear patterns.

SUSPECT: Lavant Caves discoveries, 1893

Charles Dawson and John Lewis were commissioned by the 6th Duke of Richmond to conduct investigations. The excavations produced artefacts that supposedly proved the caves were of Neolithic or early Bronze Age origin, but also included other odd objects which should not have been there. Although a paper was delivered to the Sussex Archaeology Society, a detailed excavation report was never published. The findings were considered highly suspect. It was said that workmen were paid based on what was discovered. The artefacts themselves disappeared so could not be verified.

SUSPECT: Hastings Castle figures, 1893

Dawson and Lewis investigated subterranean passages at Hastings Castle. Whilst Lewis believed they had been storerooms, Dawson stated they were dungeons, cut into rock, which he had visited as a child. His sketch of markings of figures on the wall he said he'd seen when he was 12, were no longer there so his statement couldn't be disproved.



FAKE: Beauport Park statuette, 1893

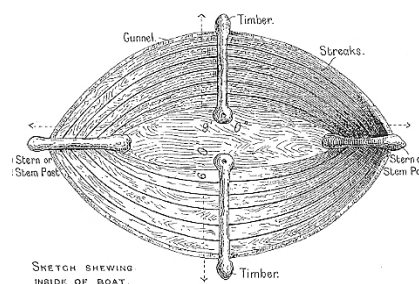


The artefact was said to have been found a few years before by a 'passing' workman. Dawson claimed it as "The earliest known example of cast iron in Europe. A transitional link between wrought and cast iron". In 1956, analysis showed that "the high level of sulphur indicates it has been produced in a coke burning furnace and could not have been made before the 18th century and not in Sussex at any date."

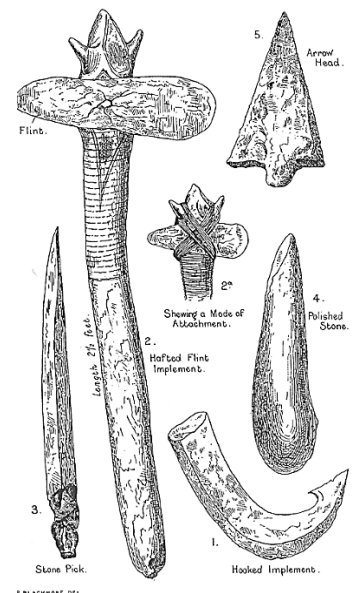
SUSPECT: "Blackmore's" Stone Axe, 1894

Dawson's sketch of a unique hafted stone axe, plus flint tools which would never have been found in Sussex. The finds could not be traced for verification.

SUSPECT: The Bexhill Boat, 1894



Pieces of wood reconstructed into a boat which Dawson claimed to be "the Missing Link between the coracle and the more modern type of boat depicted in the Bayeux tapestry". After the drawing was made, the reconstruction fell to bits. The pieces disappeared.



More fakes and hoaxes

Dawson continued to reveal great discoveries to the scientific community. These included the 1901 'Toad in the Hole' (which he possessed for five years before showing), the 1903 'Bulverhythe Hammer' (reputed to be a Mesolithic hammer but the hole had been cut with an iron knife), and three examples of impressed or stamped bricks and tiles, discovered by Dawson in the Roman *Castra* at Pevensey in 1902 (thermoluminescence in 1973 showed a firing date no earlier than between 1900 and 1940).

Other wonders included sea-serpents in the English Channel (an illustration exists but, sadly, Dawson's photographs did not come out), horned cart horses and a strange cross between the goldfish and carp. From 1898-1911, Dawson wrote many articles where he plagiarised others' work or distorted facts. In 1909 he wrote that he was still "waiting for the big 'find' which never seems to come along".

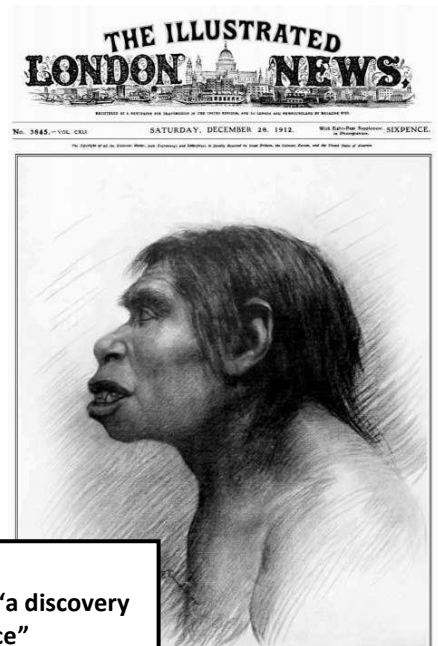
Enter Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and his 'lost world'

Conan Doyle lived near Piltdown and was in the same archaeological society as Dawson. 'The Lost World' began to be serialised in the Strand Magazine in April 1912, with colourful detail of the supposed survival into modern times of dinosaurs and ape-men, territorial species acting as a "Missing Link" between apes and humans. It included a tantalising line about bones being as easy to fake as a photograph.

The news of the Piltdown find caused a sensation. Scientists desperately wanted to believe that fossil gold had been struck. Digs in France, at Cro-Magnon, and in Germany, at Neanderthal and Heidelberg, had produced startling finds of early humans. One French palaeontologist had even dismissed his English counterparts as mere *chasseurs de cailloux* – pebble hunters. At last, England had a real fossil rival.

Piltdown man reported February 1912 (but 'backdated' to 1908).

Dawson's true genius was in presenting British palaeoanthropology with just what it wanted, a large-brained 'missing link'. This was the first fossil proof of the chain of evolution and descent with modification in Northwest Europe. As a result, Dawson achieved recognition as the greatest British antiquarian and amateur palaeontologist.



Piltdown Man *Eoanthropus dawsoni*

Press coverage in December 1912 hailed the "Fossil Man of Sussex" as "a discovery of supreme importance to all interested in the history of the human race"



'Discussion on the Piltdown Skull', painted by John Cooke in 1915, commemorates a meeting of scientists at the Royal College of Surgeons on 11 August 1913 to discuss the skull and jaw fragments of 'Piltdown Man'. Charles Dawson stands in front of a portrait of Charles Darwin.

All the other scientists in the painting based their careers on believing in Piltdown Man. Not everyone was convinced, though. Harry Morris, a bank clerk and keen amateur

archaeologist, concluded that the flints at Piltdown were not genuine. He challenged the South Kensington Museum authorities to test the implements of the same patina as the flint core which Dawson excavated in 1913. He claimed they "will be found to be white if hydrochloric acid be applied" and deliberately "stained by C. Dawson with intent to defraud".

Post-Piltdown

Dawson was never elected to the Royal Society nor did he receive his knighthood, though many others associated with the Piltdown 'find' did.

Charles Dawson FGS, FSA died of septicaemia in 1916 after a long illness. His wife had often described his office as full of fumes and toxic materials, and had likened him to Dr. Crippen. Maybe it was a slow poisoning with the chemicals used to stain artefacts? When he died, Piltdown Man died with him. No further discoveries were ever made at the dig site in Sussex. His wife destroyed most of his notebooks.

As decades passed, scientists in other countries uncovered more fossils of early ape men that differed markedly from Piltdown Man. "These had small skulls but relatively humanlike teeth – the opposite of

Piltdown," says Professor Chris Stringer of the Natural History Museum, "but many British scientists did not take them seriously because of Piltdown. They dismissed these discoveries, which we now know are genuine and important. It really damaged British science."



In the end, a team led by geologist Kenneth Oakley, anatomist Wilfrid Le Gros Clark and anthropologist Joseph Weiner took a closer look. In 1953 they announced that Piltdown's big braincase belonged to a modern human being while the jawbone came from an ape, probably an orangutan. Each piece had been stained to look as if they were from the same skull, while the teeth had been flattened with a metal file. The sculpted elephant bone (right above), found near the skull pieces and interpreted by scientists as being a ceremonial artefact, or a cricket bat, had been carved with a knife.

As Miles Russell concluded: "The earliest Englishman was nothing more than a cheap fraud." BBC News in 2004 described the word "Piltdown" as a term of abuse to label any fraudulent or shoddy research.

More to say on the 'Wizard of Sussex'?

Although Miles has already written two books about Charles Dawson and the hoax, he believes he has enough material for a third – if and when he has the time. Watch this space.

Vanessa Joseph

More from Lytchett Matravers

Work continues to trace the reported tunnel between the church and old manor house at Lytchett Matravers. Rob Heaton has continued his surveys with ground-penetrating radar, while John Oswin (Bath and Counties Archaeological Society), as mentioned in the last newsletter, brought in their Electrical Resistivity Tomography (ERT) set to profile sections through the ground along set lines. This is a much slower process than radar, but produces results that are easy to read and sees down to about four metres – deeper than radar can normally see.

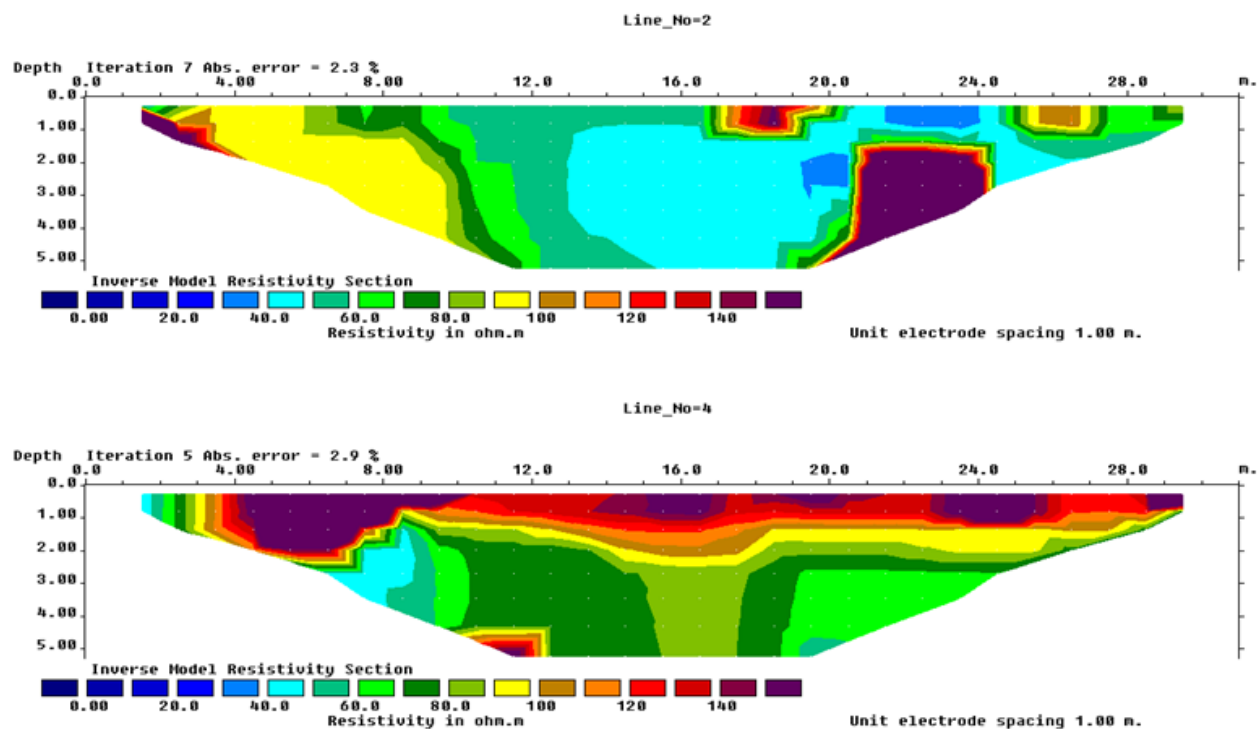
The method uses 32 probes spaced one metre apart, measuring the current through, and voltage between, sets of four probes with spacings differing between 1 and 9 metres. The bigger the spacing, the deeper you are looking. All combinations of probe and spacing are used to produce the profile section: in this survey, that meant 153 readings for each profile.

While Rob worked with the radar, John managed two profiles in the churchyard and two in the grounds of Lytchett House, the site of the original manor



house. The profile nearest the church showed a very strong masonry signal coming up from well below two metres below ground, while the profile nearest the house showed soil disturbance going down deep at the point the radar had found the possible line of a tunnel, and a point where it had probably collapsed. The two profiles between those, however, showed only very limited signs of any tunnel, which did not align well.

David is the organist at Lytchett Matravers and one of his congregation, Nita, now in her 90's, remembers being shown the tunnel in about 1952 by the then vicar. Rumours of tunnels abound, but are documented in some cases in connection with late 18th century smuggling. Another possibility is that a tunnel could have allowed a Roman Catholic priest (post-Reformation) to escape after celebrating mass. We have studied the results and are planning further work to see if we can find more definite evidence.



ERT Profile near the church (top), showing strong masonry signal from 2 metres depth downwards at 22 metres, and in the grounds of the house, showing deep-going ground disturbance at 16 metres.

A possible entrance to the tunnel at the church end has been identified – inside the church – and we're working on investigating this. Excavation in the churchyard would be difficult, given the need for a faculty from the diocese and the likelihood of encountering burials, but the owner of Lytchett House is content to see his lawn disturbed ... provided it is all put back neatly again, of course. It's hoped to do a trial evaluation very soon, perhaps leading to a limited excavation.

David Mason, Rob Heaton and John Oswin

A Neolithic Pottery Puzzle

My friend, and fellow EDAS member, Rosemary Hart sent me the links below, knowing my interest in 'stuff you find on the internet'. As it is not a new discovery, but nonetheless interesting, I decided it best suited a separate piece, rather than in the Weblinks.

Anybody who has taken part in an excavation will know the curiosity that is sparked when you find a sherd - are there more and do they fit together? To find so many sherds at such an important site as the Ness of Brodgar, and then be able to create a replica (albeit in card rather than ceramic) must be spine tingling. The story follows in these 2 links to the Ness of Brodgar Project site: [Pottery jigsaw 1](#) and [Pottery jigsaw 2](#).

Alan Dedden

The Archaeology of Myncen and Goldfields Farms

In the Gussage Valley (see map below), in the heart of Cranborne Chase, these farms have produced evidence of occupation over several thousand years. This location attracted human activity for the water of the Gussage stream and its chalk bedrock, which provided fertile flood plain conditions. Occasional patches of clay and gravels provided material for flint tools and ceramics.

With similar conditions existing across the Chase, it isn't surprising that it was a hive of activity in the prehistoric period. Pitt Rivers spent many years exploring sites on and around his Rushmore Estate, including the Woodcutts Romano-British village less than 2 miles from Myncen.

Both farms are now owned by Simon Meaden and his family, running a mixed arable economy with other rural businesses. Archaeological exploration and excavations by EDAS (pictured), Bournemouth University ("BU") and TV's Time Team has given evidence of the longevity of human activity on their land. It is a heritage of which they are rightly proud and determined to preserve.



Myncen Farm

The farm encompasses part of the remains of a former medieval settlement, probably centred around Gussage St Andrews church (c. 1291). In 1986, ploughing produced surface finds suggesting a Roman building in the vicinity, and BU's geophysical surveys from 1991 revealed the building outline and elements of an enclosure system. Time Team's interest in 1996 initially came to nothing.

Meanwhile, the farm's pigs began excavation by unearthing tesserae, leaving no doubt that a substantial building was buried. It was clearly in a vulnerable state, requiring assessment of its state of preservation and need for protection. Local professional archaeologist Christopher Sparey Green, with the support of Dorchester museum's curator, drew up an evaluation plan that led to him directing excavations over five seasons up to 2001. Work would be carried out under the auspices of EDAS, using their volunteers.

Investigations began in 1996 with test trenches and clearance of a limited area identified by finds scatter. Thirty test pits and 14 trenches were used to identify the remains, partly crossing the farm access road. In all, about 19% of the building's structure was excavated, showing a large complex of three separate buildings with flint wall foundations, covering c. 0.7 hectares.

Villa site

The main villa structure (Building 1 – see site plan below) had at least 13 rooms on a footprint of at least 0.12 hectares, comparable to larger Dorset villas such as Dewlish. A hypocaust provided underfloor heating for a bath suite in the north-eastern range, while fine geometric mono & polychrome patterned mosaic floors were evident in the western range, with evidence of other tessellated flooring throughout. Debris of polychrome wall plaster, some identified as part of a figurative mural, implied a building of considerable status. The Time Team bath suite excavation in 2003 unearthed two fragments of wall plaster each with human eyes drawn on them.

Only limited excavation was possible on Building 2 in the south-east corner of the complex because of farming work. However, that did reveal a structure believed to be a bath or tank. Further south, the outline of an elongated structure (Building 3), shown only by the geophysical survey, seems to have been an aisled building extending into the area of Myncen farmhouse.

Finds of domestic objects such as pottery (mainly Black Burnished



ware from Poole Harbour and New Forest ware, most likely from Verwood), metalwork, personal items and coins were limited due to the selective approach to excavation. Midden remains included oyster shells and animal bone from cattle, horse, sheep and birds, with a significantly higher level of game fowl from the 3rd and 4th centuries. As expected from a high-status Romano-British building, debris included window glass, mortar, ceramic and limestone roof tile fragments, as well as greensand foundation blocks. An almost complete flint wall lay where it had fallen as the building collapsed. Worked stone that would probably have adorned the villa had been robbed to be re-used in later structures, e.g. a well carved block of stone with builder's lug holes in the wall of the nearby Cashmoor Inn.



Greensand foundation quoins

The main villa building had been partially constructed on a pre-Roman enclosure with an Iron Age settlement, with several stages of renovation and change over its use. With little dating evidence prior to the 3rd and 4th centuries CE, it is unclear when the first villa structures were built. The neighbouring (5km away) Tarrant Hinton villa is thought to be roughly contemporary, suggested as slowly metamorphosing from the Iron Age, with Romanised settlement 2nd-3rd centuries. Evidence at Myncen implies continued use after the beginning of the 5th century, before disuse and collapse. Medieval pottery in the infills of the main building suggest that it was almost certainly repurposed during the post-Roman period.

Goldfields Farm

To the south of Myncen, the farmland at Goldfields has seen several investigations, including geophysical surveys between 1996 and 2001 by BU under Iain Hewitt. Aerial photography had shown a ring ditch and other linear features, with trenches then excavated to help understand the site's origins and significance. Apart from occasional Neolithic flints found in the subsoil, the earliest recorded human activity were a Middle Bronze Age ring ditch and structural post holes.

Late Iron Age/early Romano-British presence was represented by a series of field boundaries and a small grave group of about 11 burials from the late Romano British period, which produced coffin and hob nails, with one grave having deposits of a young dog, an indented beaker and a coin. These finds suggested that there had been a settlement on Goldfields Farm land, although there was no evidence of an association with the Myncen villa site. However, it would be reasonable to speculate that people living at Goldfields might have played a role in servicing the villa complex, as the items in the graves point to Romano-British rather than Iron Age cultural affiliation.

Time Team

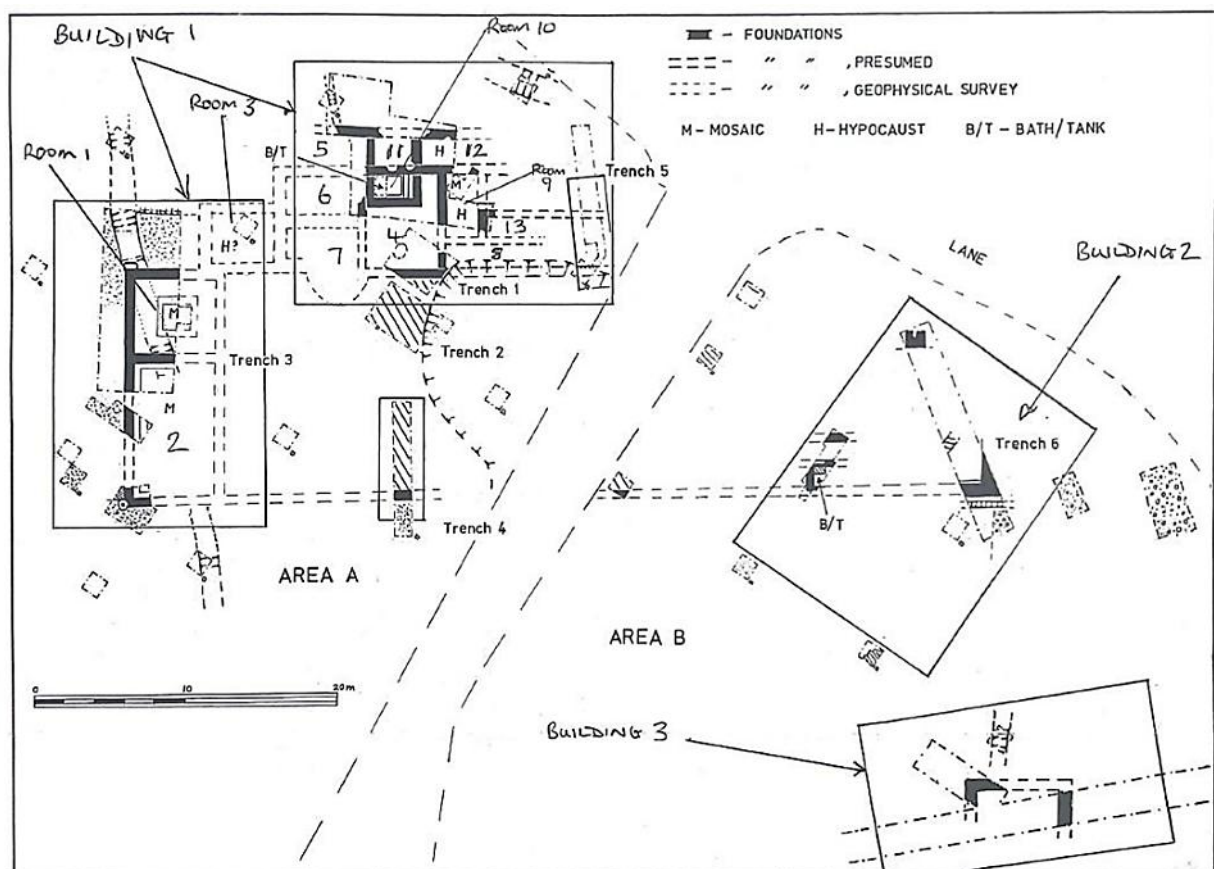
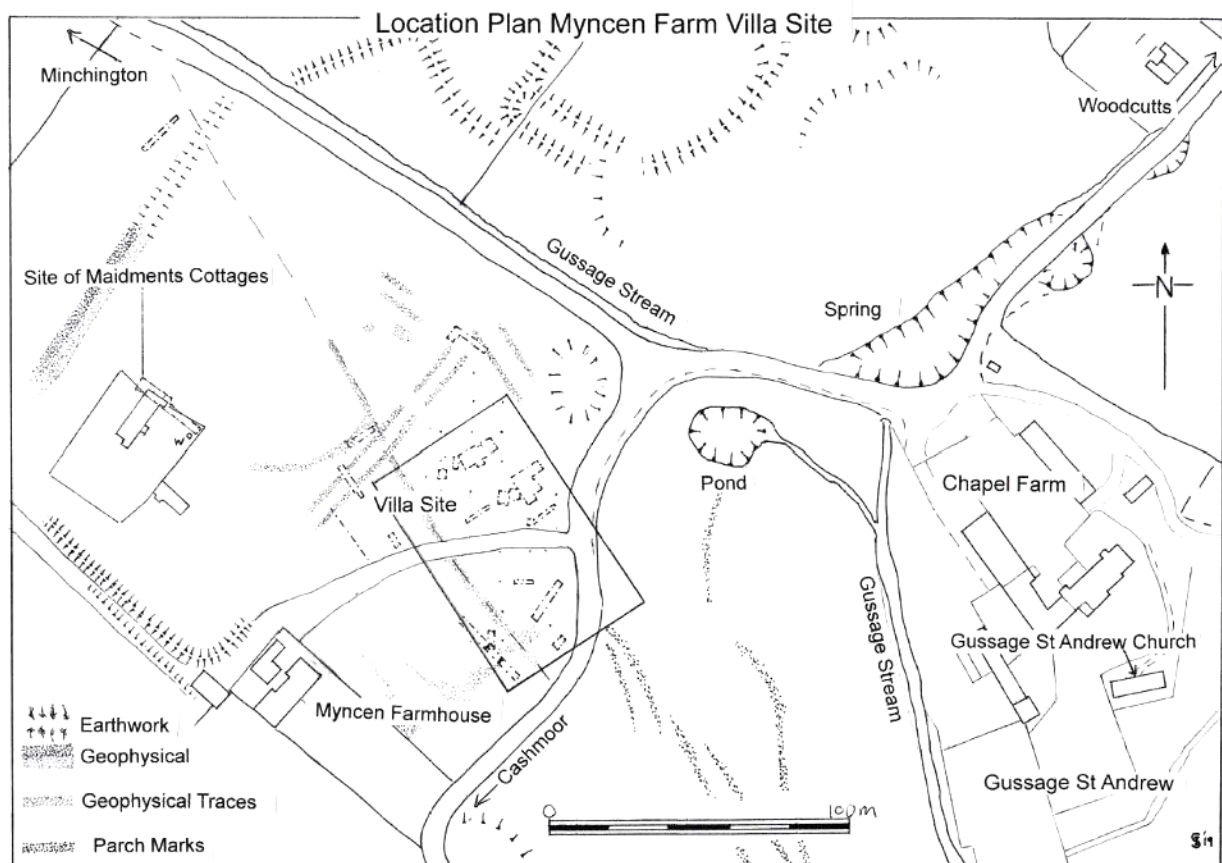
In October 2003 Time Team arrived to carry out a televised 3-day excavation of both Myncen and Goldfields sites, inviting some EDAS volunteers to participate. With both sites already having been subject to surveys and excavation, they concentrated their efforts upon surveying the land between the two farms, where they were unable to find evidence of any further archaeological features, before investigating known locations most likely to provide interesting finds. They also carried out a detailed excavation of the bath house in the north-east range, clarifying the layout of the adjacent rooms, whilst at Goldfields they explored further graves in the cemetery.

The results of their work can be seen in the Time Team episode "Cranborne Chase, Dorset" (series 11, episode 13, 27 March 2004), with a short report by Wessex Archaeology in May 2004.



Plunge pool excavated in 2003

Summary/interim reports on excavations at both sites are in the Dorset Natural History and Archaeology Society Proceedings: Volume 128 (2006) pp.53-60 (Myncen) and on the Archaeology Data Service website (Goldfields) <https://doi.org/10.5284/1028819>.



Phil D'Eath

Weblink Highlights Midsummer 2026

There should be items for every interest in this list. I don't know if it is the longest, but it must be close. Having recently had a minor dental procedure, I shudder at the thought of the two items on medieval dentistry and, even more astonishing, 60,000 years ago by Neanderthals. However painful, they do not rank alongside the discovery of trepanning at any stage before anaesthetics became available.

The revelation that the Upton Lovell shaman has been found to be a woman once again highlights the dangers of assumptions made with no evidence to support them. This burial has long been the subject of a prime display at Devizes Museum, but that will now need to be revised with a whole new perspective for this Bronze Age metalworking woman.

Discovering a 200 year old illicit still in the highlands may surprise nobody, but it does raise the question – how many were there, and how many have so far been found? Illicit stills feature in Scottish traditional folk songs and stories and are known to have been very common, so presumably there are many more sites yet to be discovered.

Alan Dedden

Weblinks No. 88 – Midsummer 2026

4 More Sailors From The Franklin Expedition Identified [Live Science](#)

Gold Scabbard Found Under Fallen Tree In Norway [Live Science](#)

Earliest Known Dental Bridge Found In Medieval Aberdeen Burial [Archaeology News Online](#)

Bowling Alley Dig In Weymouth Makes 'Significant Discoveries' [BBC News](#)

New Findings Emerge About Isle Of Lewis Crannog [Archaeology News Online](#) & [BBC News](#)

For more info see write-up of Stephanie Blankshein's talk in Oct 2024 Newsletter

200 Year-Old Illicit Still Found In The Highlands [BBC News](#)

30 Researchers Publish Critique Of Study That Questioned Date Of Human Occupation Of Monte Verde [Live Science](#)

Drilled Tooth Reveals Neanderthals Practised Dentistry 60,000 Years Ago [Live Science](#)

2,000 Year-Old Roman Marble Head Found During Spanish Beach Dig [ny post.com](#)

DNA Confirms 'Hugging Skeletons' Are Poland's Only Medieval Same Sex Burial [Live Science](#)

Neolithic Hall Reconstruction Unveiled At Stonehenge [BBC News](#)

2m Statue Of Athena Found At Laodicea, Turkey [Türkiye Today](#)

The Giant Gets A Makeover, But Needed More Frequently Due To Climate Change [BBC News](#)

Remains Of Queen Elisendra Found At Royal Monastery In Barcelona [Archaeology News Online](#)

Gold Roman Ring Found By Detectorist In 2018 Acquired By SWHT To Be Displayed At Taunton Museum [The Somerset Leveller](#)

Britain's Oldest Prehistoric Art Confirmed After Being Dismissed For Decades [BBC News](#)

Medieval Buildings Found In Leicestershire Dig [BBC News](#)

Centuries Of Paris History Emerging From Digs At Notre Dame [smithsonian mag](#)

New Theory On How The Altar Stone Got To Stonehenge [BBC News](#)

Bronze Age Torcs Found By Metal Detectorists In Cumberland [BBC News](#)

'Princely Grave' Of Celtic Warrior With Chariot Found In Germany [smithsonian mag](#)

Lavish Villa Found Outside Rome May Have Been Visited By 3 Emperors [Live Science](#)

Ancient DNA Shows A Complex, New, Society Emerged After The Fall Of The Roman Empire [Archaeology News Online](#)

Simpler, Older Version Of Stonehenge Found 3 Miles Away [BBC News](#)

'Special' Door To Lawrence Of Arabia On Display At Expanded Wareham Town Museum [BBC News](#)

Cave Collapse In Israel Reveals 300,000 Year Old 'Time Capsule' Shedding Light On Obscure Clan [Times of Israel](#)

WW1 Training Trenches Found During Dig At Site Of Tudor Palace, Ampthill, Bedfordshire [BBC News](#)

Possible Statue Of Artemis Found At Ancient Heraclea Sintica In Bulgaria [Archaeology News Online](#)

Herculaneum Scroll Read By Virtual Unwrapping [Vesuvius Challenge](#)

Abandoned Victorian Sea Fort Set To Be Transformed Into Event Space [BBC News](#)

Dog Walker Finds Bronze Age Axe Head In The Forest Of Dean [BBC News](#)

Ceremonial Bronze Chariot Found In Spain [hertagedaily.com](#)

2,500 Year-Old Tomb Of 'Warrior Prince' With Chariot & Helmet On The Adriatic Coast [Live Science](#)

Possible Iron Age Settlement Found Near Royal Wootton Bassett [BBC News](#)

Babies And Adults Buried Together In Medieval Swedish Graves Were Not Related [Live Science](#)

'Genius' Found At Vindolanda [vindolanda.com](#)

5 Iron Shackles Found In France Highlighting Celtic Slave Trade 2,300 Years Ago [Live Science](#)

DNA Analysis Shows Upton Lovell Shaman Was A Woman [Live Science](#)

2,000 Year-Old Burials At Marina El Alamein With Golden Tongues [Archaeology News Online](#)

Neanderthal Extinction Probably From Breeding With Homo Sapiens, Not Inbreeding [smithsonian mag](#)

Romans And Vikings Left Few Genetic Traces Of Occupation Of Britain [Archaeology News Online](#)

Medieval Shipwreck Found In Lake Constance [Euronews](#)

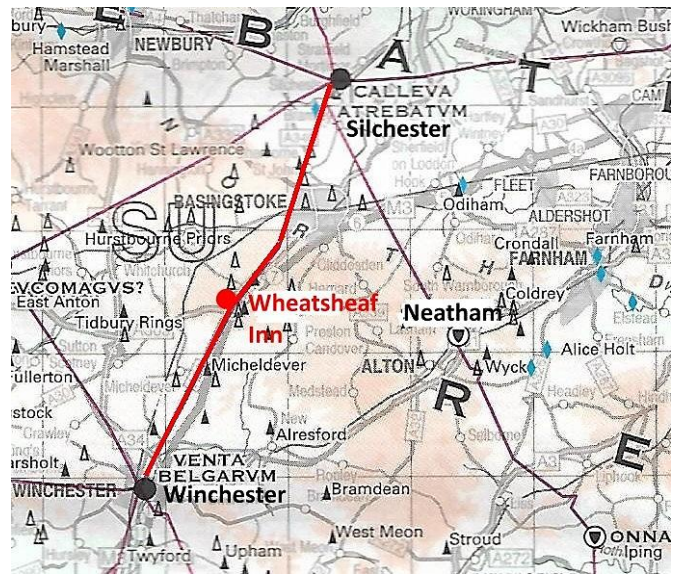
Gold Viking Sword Pommel Found In Northamptonshire By Metal Detectorist [BBC News](#)

Online Nonsense

As some of you may know, I do like a walk and try to get out regularly with EDHT and Verwood Ramblers. Given my interest in local history, I could not resist the 3-stage linear walk organised by Verwood Ramblers, starting at Old Sarum and ending at Badbury Rings, following Ackling Dyke as much as public rights of way allowed. This turns out to be almost all of the route, with the annoying exception of the stretch of the A354 from the Woodyates junction to the car wash and mechanic just before Oakley Down. Yes, the A354 is a public highway so we could walk along it, but that 1 mile fast stretch with no verge would be almost suicidal, so we opted for a 2.3 mile diversion through Pentridge.

To make the walks a little different (I like to think more interesting), I talk about historic events or places around my routes, and was asked by the leader of this walk to contribute Roman-related stories. In the course of researching for this, I stumbled across a prolific vlogger on historic subjects with a piece on the 'mystery' of *Vindomi* – a place featured in the Antonine Itinerary with various versions of the name (e.g. *Vindomis*, *Vindonium*), approximately midway between Winchester and Silchester but apparently of unknown location.

So, out of curiosity and with a few minutes to spare, I clicked on the vlog hoping to learn something. The vlogger decided that the way to locate *Vindomi* was to take the Itinerary distances from Winchester and Silchester, despite known inaccuracies in those mileages (Roman miles), draw arcs on a map and examine the intersecting two points. Perhaps unsurprisingly, nothing was found to indicate *Vindomi* at either location – both, as you will guess, well off the line between Winchester and Silchester ... which should give a clue. Why not, I thought, look at the OS maps? Starting with the current editions, the route is marked (a fairly straight line between Winchester and Silchester), and also on the 6in 1888 edition. Ignoring Antonine Itinerary distances and looking around the halfway point, there is, just off the line to the east, the village of Dummer (childhood home of Sarah Ferguson).



That immediately rang bells - *Vindomi*, Dummer - could there be a link? Then, looking at the Hampshire Historic Environment Record (not as 'user friendly' as Dorset HER, by the way), a Roman settlement was identified during the M3 construction and subject to a rescue excavation in 1969, just south-west of Dummer and near the Wheatsheaf Inn. An internet search confirms this is now believed to be the site of *Vindomi*, despite earlier very unlikely suggestions that it was at Neatham (on the Silchester to Chichester Roman road, nowhere near the Winchester to Silchester route). This took me about 10 minutes!



The Wheatsheaf Inn (now Wheatsheaf Hotel, North Waltham) is an old coaching inn and posting station alongside the A30 at a point where that follows the line of the Roman road. You could imagine the Romans also found this a convenient place for the *Cursus Publicus* (Imperial postal service) to have a *mutatio* to change horses, or even a *mansio* for overnight lodging.

I fumed over this for a little while, intending to go back and write about the fact that anybody can now post unresearched nonsense online, and have unsuspecting people view it, and also to grab a screenshot of the intersecting arcs. When I did go back to the vlog, I found it had been removed and replaced with a similar story that now points to the recognised site (and discredits the intersecting arcs method). This, at least, proves I was not the only one to spot the nonsense and, unlike me, actually respond in the linked comments.

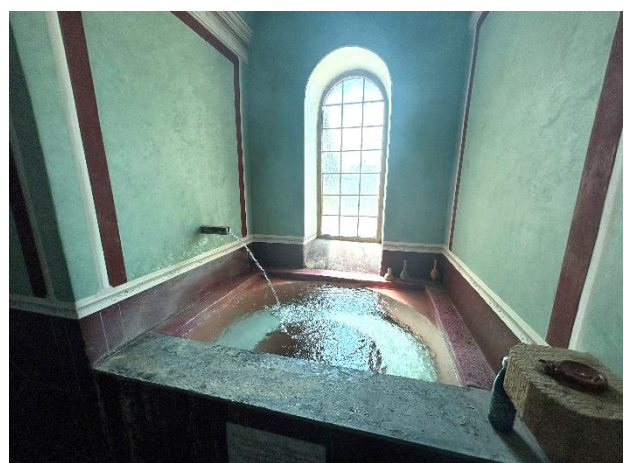
Before going back to this story, I had looked at another of his vlogs, this time claiming that the high agger of some Roman roads, such as the stretch of Ackling Dyke on Cranborne Chase, was because they had repaired them. His reasoning for this was that they were constructed in layers. Two seconds thought and the nonsense becomes clear - if the high agger is due to repair, is it not strange that the road needed repair for several miles, but for miles either way from that section, it did not need repair? Or that some roads – take the Lake Gates to Bath road as a local example – never needed repair along their whole length? It is well documented in many (probably every) authoritative sources, that the roads were constructed in layers. I rest my case and, incidentally, I have not and will not look at any of his postings in future.

Alan Dedden

Trip to 'The Newt', Somerset

On a warm, and sometimes wet, 10th June a group of 33 members from EDAS and Wareham & District Archaeology and Local History Society made their way to The Newt, a privately owned estate near Castle Cary. The attractions on site include a Roman villa complex and RHS-recognised gardens.

A dedicated, state of the art, interactive museum incorporates the exposed bathhouse remains of the substantial villa, first excavated from 1968 but discovered to be even larger than thought from further work in 2015-17. The nearby full-scale 'Villa Ventorum', with outbuildings and gardens, re-imagines all aspects of life associated with living in a well-appointed household around 350 AD. Using the latest technology, visitors are guided around the complex, the tour concluding with a virtual reality experience of everyday life in each room of the building.



Feedback about the trip was unanimously positive, with everyone having experienced a fascinating and enjoyable day out despite the changeable weather. For anyone interested in visiting, the entry fee is quite expensive but is waived on Tuesdays and Wednesdays for RHS members (and members of the 'Sculptures on the Lake' attraction at Pallington, not far from Dorchester), who can take in non-member guests for a reduced rate.

Phil D'Eath

2026 visit to Bournemouth University's 'Big Dig'

Following two days of intensive heat, when university excavations were suspended for health and safety reasons, members of Wareham and East Dorset archaeology/antiquarian groups were treated to a tour of the site near Winterborne Kingston in comparatively benign conditions on 26th June. Following a welcome from Miles Russell, the site director, our tour was led by Paul Cheetham, now retired but still just as enthusiastic about the ongoing discoveries at the Big Dig site.

Identifying features in the main excavation area has been more difficult this year as the chalk there is capped by a layer of soil with high clay content and flints. However, the search for buried features has revealed a second banjo enclosure to accompany the one being investigated in previous seasons. It unusual to have two so close together, so this will enable comparisons to be made and more to be learnt about the people who lived and farmed the hillside over millennia. One difference that immediately stood out is the paucity of significant-sized pits this year, with only one having been discovered compared to the large number previously, with the base not reached by the time of the visit. It showed signs of weathering before being infilled, also unlike the earlier ones.



Admiring Vanessa's excavation work.

Three skeletons found in this area have all been identified as being young males. Although buried with respect, the lack of any accompanying artefacts suggests that they may well have been labourers engaged in more menial tasks on the site.

Features from the Bronze Age, Iron Age and Roman periods have emerged, mainly in the form of ditches. There are distinct differences in their scale, depth and orientation with the shallowness of the Bronze Age structures compared to the depth and straightness of the Roman ones. The Iron Age ditches of the banjo enclosure are large, and would have been accompanied by significant banks. Not thought to be for defensive purposes, it is likely that they were to keep animals secure or perhaps to act as settlement boundaries, since they contain traces of round houses with surrounding gullies.



Bronze Age ditch.



Paul Cheetham and round house gully.

Following the end of the tour we were shown some of the best 'finds' from this season's excavations. including worked flints, a broken stone axe, broken metal/shale 'jewellery', and some Roman coins and building materials. Interestingly, there were fragments of ceramic and limestone roof tile, so who knows what else there is to discover on this fascinating site?

Thanks to Miles Russell, Paul Cheetham and the rest of the university staff on site for their time in accommodating our visit.

Phil D'Eath

Guided tours of Cerne Abbas

EDAS members Janet and Gordon Bartlet kindly opened their home to provide tours for EDAS members on two occasions this June and July. The building in Cerne Abbas, known as Barton Farm House, gets a brief mention in the Royal Commission's report on Historical Monuments, but without reference to its possible age and significance. However, a neighbouring building known as the stable was reported to be late 17th century in origin.

The Bartlet's extensive and painstaking restoration has exposed a variety of Tudor features, including large fireplaces and roof beams that were dendrochronologically tested. The results revealed a tree felling date of circa 1510-1542, which places the likely primary building stage as an open hall in the reign of Henry VIII (there's a lot more information about the building in Janet's article in the April 2024 newsletter).



During the tour of the house, Gordon demonstrated the operation of several of the antique music-making machines that he has collected and restored over the years. With his obvious interest in mechanical devices, he also introduced the group to his working model tramway that has become a popular attraction for both children and adults at local fetes and other events (see also October 2023 and December 2024 newsletters).



Following a brief lunch break Janet led a fascinating tour of some of the most historically interesting buildings and sites in Cerne Abbas, starting at the very impressive neighbouring Tithe Barn. The building has its origins in the 14th century, but one end was converted to a house about 200 years ago.

After enjoying views of the many old houses and pubs in the high street, we were given a guided tour of St Mary's church by one of Janet's friends. Amongst many interesting features, we were shown the surviving, recently restored, medieval wall paintings (1360-1380) and admired the huge



stained glass windows in the chancel. These are far larger than would be expected for a church of its size; they're thought to have come from the nearby Benedictine abbey that was destroyed following the dissolution and its closure in 1539. It would have been a considerable operation to dismantle and to conceal the windows to prevent their destruction.

The final part of the tour was spent exploring what remains of the abbey precinct. This included views of the comparatively modern 'Abbey House', a section of which encompasses part of the original gatehouse; the grade I listed 15th century abbey 'guest house' (left below); the stone built vaulted 'Abbot's Porch' entrance to what was the abbot's hall (right); the grade II listed early 16th century barn to the north and the ancient spring to the south known as St Augustine's Well. Continuing excavations of the abbey itself by Hugh Wilmott's team from Sheffield University had only just started by the time of the 2nd tour in July, but the small group of EDAS members who attended were able to see some of the newly opened trenches.



Many thanks to Janet and Gordon for kindly volunteering to offer the opportunity to visit their lovingly restored home and to guide us around the amazing range of historical sites in Cerne Abbas village.

Phil D'Eath

What's the story behind an object that's important to you?

The Museum of East Dorset is putting together a new exhibition and we want you to help shape it.

The exhibition will be built around objects chosen by people from our local community. But we're not looking for the kinds of things you might expect to find in a museum. Instead, we're interested in the objects that have meaning because of the stories they carry.

It could be something that makes people laugh, something that represents an important moment in someone's life, an everyday object with an extraordinary story, something curious, surprising or deeply personal. The value isn't in the object itself – it's in why it matters. It could be a worn-out keyring, a lucky spoon, a bus ticket, a toy, a recipe book, a football scarf!

We're particularly keen for the exhibition to reflect the breadth of experiences, identities and communities that make up East Dorset. And, submissions can be individual or put together as a group.

Selected submissions will form part of a public exhibition at the museum in October 2026, showcasing a rich and deeply personal collection of objects and photographs.

For more information, or to suggest an object, please click on the link below.

[See your objects inside a museum - Museum of East Dorset](#)

Vanessa Joseph

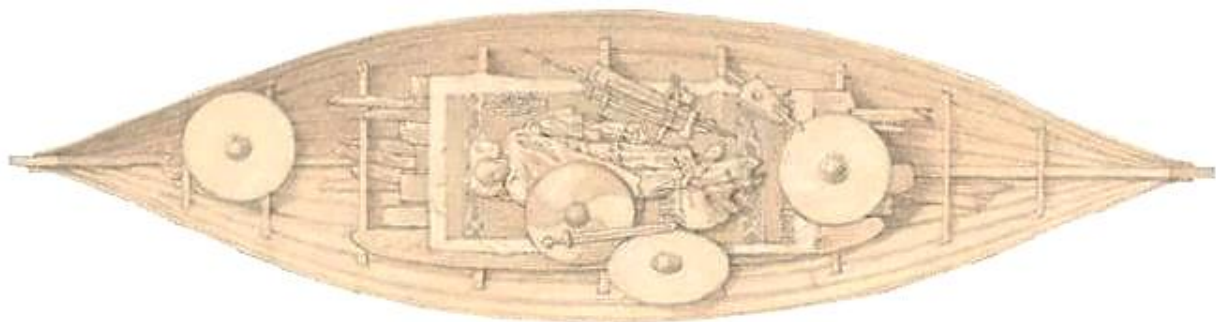
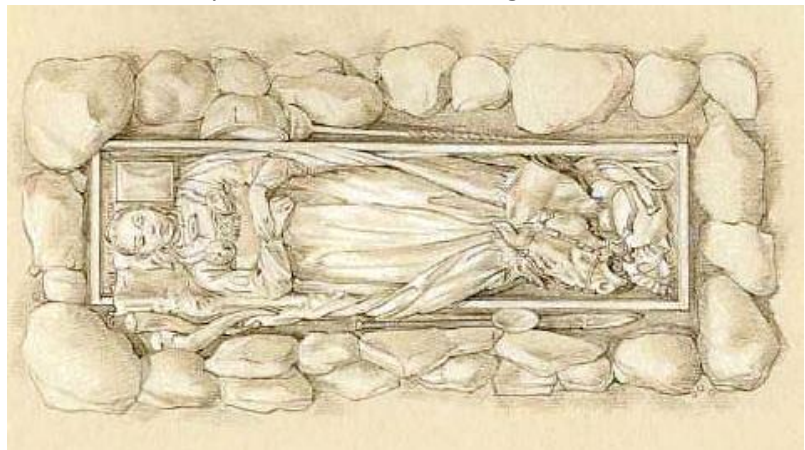
Viking funerals and burials 2

In the previous article based on Neil Price's original paper, we looked at various examples of Viking burials with links to Norse sagas and poetry, as well as suggested funeral processes that could be similarly viewed. As Neil put it "burials may have involved complex elements of mortuary theatre ...narratives enacted at the graveside". He also said that his proposal is speculative, though linked directly to the archaeological evidence of the excavated burials. This article looks at a few more of Neil's case studies before trying to draw a conclusion.

There does seem to be referencing between monuments to the dead, as with the picture stones in the previous article, and the severed horse heads found in many burials. Looking at the Kaupang ship burial described previously, which had an earlier burial under it, some of the further ship burials at Kaupang were the same – a relatively simple male burial some time before the ships were placed over them, often with multiple individuals.

The so-called 'queen' found in 1883 at Gausel, near Stavanger in Norway, was buried with a horse's head, as were three other people in the same cemetery, all four with bridles of gilded bronze. The 'queen' was finely dressed and wearing, or surrounded by, "a plethora of expensive items".

Pictured here, later investigation shows she dates to 850-860, contemporary with the other female with a horse's head. Two males with horse's heads were in ship burials, one shown below, both surrounded by weapons, but couldn't be dated closer than the Viking Age (both drawings are by Þórhallur Þráinsson).



The Gotland picture stones were mentioned earlier, with an example shown that had several pictures referencing parts of the story of Sigurðr. In fact, there are hundreds of small scenes on the stones, mostly uninterpreted, although it has long been thought that they represent narratives of some kind. Clearly, we don't know what stories these relate to, which doesn't mean that the stories never existed.

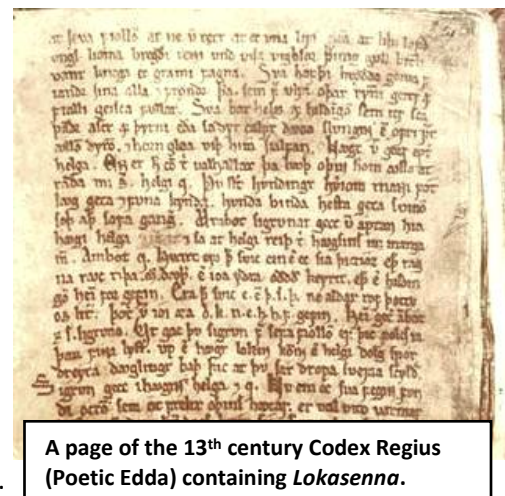
In fact, contemporary Viking evidence of lost narratives comes with the Rök runestone (pictured below), an early 9th century Swedish monument, 2.4m high, with the longest runic inscription in the world. It was found built into the wall of a 12th century church in the 19th century, and later removed to stand nearby under a protective roof. Erected by a man named Varin to honour his deceased son, Vämöð, it features a complex, enigmatic text that includes mythological references, such as a stanza about the Ostrogothic king Theodoric the Great (effectively ruler of the Western Roman Empire). The stone lists many other narratives but the allusions are mostly unclear – short phrases, perhaps riddles or hints, which seem to assume prior knowledge. Recent work suggests they are local variants of the great epics.



It probably isn't surprising that most past narratives – myths, stories, poems, etc. – have been lost. Consider the very well-known poem of *Beowulf*, admittedly Old English, although it is about 5th and 6th century Scandinavians and probably originated there. It is thought that the story was first written down in the 7th century, although the Nowell Codex from which it is known was probably copied around 1000 AD (page pictured above, from the British Library). Surprisingly, to me at least, this is the only manuscript in which it survives and no-one has found a reference to it in any other text. Even that manuscript was lucky to survive a fire in 1731, which charred the edges and resulted in its current fragile condition.

Decades of studies of mortuary behaviours, across many cultures, show that they relate to the dead person's life, their relationships to the living and their possible destination(s) beyond the grave. It is clear that Viking funerals included sequences of complex actions, often over quite long periods, seen from Ibn Fadlan and similar accounts, and the evidence from the excavated burials. We've seen a limited number of examples with a clear link between the monuments to the dead and known stories. However, the types of memorials and funeral practices examined here exist on thousands of other sites where we can't match known stories. Clearly, there must equally be thousands of stories that are now lost. The suggestion, then, is that many (perhaps most) Viking funerals involved the material manifestation of stories. There may have been personalised stories for some, and particular tales relating to groups such as families or clans. You would imagine that the story told would include something related to the deceased's own life and, indeed, to those who organised the funeral.

The original article looks more deeply into the creation and evolution of Norse mythology and other 'stories', where even the big epics, such as those about the gods or other supernatural beings, were clearly invented by someone originally but have changed in re-telling over centuries. I've not gone into that here, although one point struck me about the link between Viking poetry and dramas. It has long been known that many of the poems have several characters and what might be seen as 'speaking parts', but more recent studies have shown some to have clear settings, such as Viking halls (as in *Lokasenna*, a contest between Loki and the gods), and even stage directions and marginal notes for actors. This could, of course, suggest a link to funerary stories.



A page of the 13th century Codex Regius (Poetic Edda) containing *Lokasenna*.

You can obviously make your own minds up about the suggested model, though my summary clearly doesn't cover a lot of the arguments Neil makes. Unfortunately, unless you have the relevant log-in (perhaps through an institution), it is rather expensive to obtain a copy!

Geoff Taylor

EDAS PROGRAMME

Unless stated lectures are at 7:30pm at St Catherine's Church Hall, Lewens Lane, Wimborne, BH21 1LE.
The hall won't be open before 7pm.

Wed 9th September	Lecture	Cindy Wood	Medieval women and how to find them
Wed 14th October	Lecture	Gail Wakeham	Emerging insights into a long lived settlement at Station Rd, Fordingbridge
Wed 11th November	Lecture	Phil Trim	A Tale of Two Kilns: Roman pottery production at Arne, Poole Harbour
Wed 9th December	Lecture	Luke Mouland	Life in the Victorian Workhouse
2027			
Wed 13th January	Lecture	Cheryl Green	Re-discovering the lost medieval manor at Putton Lane, Chickerel, Dorset
Wed 17th February	Lecture	Lorraine Mephram	Fifty sherds of grey: making sense of Pottery NOT 2nd WEDNESDAY
Wed 10th March	AGM and Lecture	Robert Heaton	Exploring opportunities with GPR
Wed 14th April	Lecture	Colin Edwards	Dorset & Dr Beeching
Wed 12th May	ZOOM Lecture	David Roberts & Denise Wilding	Garson's Field Roman villa

DISTRICT DIARY

DNHAS meetings aren't included here unless I'm notified – please check their website.

Wed 16th September	Victorian Wareham	Wareham Society	Lilian Ladle
Thurs 17th September	Mycenaeans and Minoans	AVAS	Francis Taylor
Sat 10th October	SPECIAL EVENT: 40 th anniversary afternoon. See their website here	Wareham Society	Lilian Ladle & Julian Richards
Thurs 15th October	From the Solent to the Downs. Southern Hampshire and the Isle of Wight in Late Iron Age and Roman times	AVAS	Tony King
Wed 21st October	Viking Dorset	Wareham Society	Wayne Bartlett
Wed 18th November	Arne and Stoborough though time	Wareham Society	Ben Buxton
Thurs 19th November	The English Civil War - local people and places	AVAS	Neil McLocklin
Wed 2nd December	In Search of Caratacus: Great king of Iron Age Britain	Wareham Society	Miles Russell

Archaeology Societies

- Avon Valley Archaeological Society: <http://www.avas.org.uk/>
Meetings at Ibsley Village Hall, BH24 3NL (<https://ibsleyhall.co.uk/>), 7:30pm 3rd Thursday of month except June, July & August. Visitors £3.50 CASH; membership £10 pa.
- Blandford Museum Archaeology Group:
<https://blandfordtownmuseum.org.uk/blandford-museum-archaeology-group/>
Meetings normally 7:30pm 4th Thursday of each month September to May at the Woodhouse Gardens Pavilion, The Tabernacle, DT11 7GQ. Visitors £3; membership £10 pa.
- Bournemouth Natural Sciences Society: <http://bnss.org.uk>
Events at 39 Christchurch Road, Bournemouth BN1 3NS; lectures Tuesday 7:30pm/Saturday 2:30pm. In-house archaeology talks are, as far as I can tell, free for non-members (donations appreciated). There are also some *Zoom* presentations, particularly aimed at members, though non-members can email bnssmembership@gmail.com to see whether they can send you a 'link' for the talk.
- Dorset Natural History & Archaeology Society: <https://www.dorsetmuseum.org/whats-on/>
Events in Dorchester, usually ticketed and charged unless you're a DNHAS member.
- Wareham and District Archaeology & Local History Society: <https://wareham-archaeology.com/>
Meetings at Furzebrook Village Hall, BH20 5AR, normally 7:30pm 3rd Wednesday of each month except July & August. Visitors welcome for £5; membership £15 pa.