

THE NORTH HERTS ANTIQUARY



PRODUCED BY THE NORTH HERTS ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

NUMBER I

NOVEMBER 1965

HON. EDITORS

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FREE TO MEMBERS

The Official Bulletin of the North Herts Archaeological Society.

This screed will appear regularly before members if it receives sufficient support. Contributions from members are not invited but demanded; any items of interest to readers will be welcome. For the time being, the Chairman and Secretary are honorary editors, and contributors as well, so please help to lighten their burden by participating as well.

Some of the items covered will be: firearms and weapons, coins, recent excavations and discoveries, book notes, details of other societies' activities, notes and queries, local history, general archaeological news items.

Contributions should be typed, if possible, with double-spacing between lines. All items should be as concise as possible; contributions will be reproduced in full but the editors will not accept responsibility for the views stated.

FORTHCOMING LECTURES. January - Geology for archaeologists; February - The County Record Office and local history (provisional date 8th)
March - The excavation of fossil mammals, and forming a British Cave Research Centre (provisional date 8th)
All in the Library Hall, Letchworth at 8.0 p.m.

BEDFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY.

Wednesday 15th December "A Tour of Egypt" by R.G. Miller, M.D.

Wednesday 16th February "Anthropology and Archaeology" by Mr V. Williams, B.A.

Wednesday 16th March "Excavations at Elstow Abbey" by D. Baker, B.A. & P. Tilson.

Wednesday 6th April "Records and destruction" by Tony Hales.

Visitors are welcome. Lectures will be in the Town Hall, St Pauls Square, Bedford. 7.15.

SOUTH BEDFORDSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY.

Tuesday 22nd March "Monumental Brasses" by A.W. Guppy, B.Sc.

Tuesday 26th April "The Romano-British Villa" by W.H. Manning, B.Sc.

Lectures will be held in the Carnegie Room at the Central Library at 7.30 p.m.
Luton

ROYSTON LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY.

December 9th "The Archaeology of North Hertfordshire" by John Moss-Eccardt.

January 21st Annual General Meeting. "Developments in Royston" by D.J. Walker,
Town Clerk of Royston.

February 17th "The work of the County Record Office" by Peter Valne, M.A., F.S.A.

March 25th. "Simple Annals of the Poor - A survey of the relief of the Royston Poor, 1700 - 1840.

Lectures will be held in Garden Walk Secondary School, Royston. 7.45 p.m.

SCIENCE AND ARCHAEOLOGY

The importance of scientific methods in archaeological research has been realised for many years. It has now become obvious, however, that the co-ordination of the various procedures is a very necessary step for the further elucidation and study of the many complex problems encountered in the wide field of archaeology. The days when samples and finds were handed to specialists for them to provide barely understood appendices to the report, are now over. Indeed, when possible, the problems of a particular site are studied long before excavation commences, and a knowledge of the various techniques and special lines of investigation now available is essential to the modern archaeologist.

In 1963 a collection of papers by scientists and archaeologists was published by Thames and Hudson under the title of "Science in Archaeology";

the editors were Don Brothwell and Eric Higge (both of whom have lectured to our society) and the book covers most of the latest methods in use.

One method of dating, developed just prior to publication of the papers, is known as the Potassium-Argon method and this assists in determining the age of deposits covering a considerable time-span. This technique depends on the fact that all naturally occurring potassium contains 0.01 % of a radioactive isotope, potassium 40, which during decay yields calcium-40 and argon-40, potassium-40 giving a half-life of 1.30×10^{10} years. As a number of fairly common minerals in both sedimentary and igneous rocks of the Tertiary and Quaternary eras contain potassium, this method will be extremely useful in the study of the earliest phases of Man's physical and cultural evolution.

A second method, obsidian dating, depends on the fact that a freshly exposed surface of volcanic glass, obsidian, will absorb water from its surroundings to form a measurable hydration layer. Thus the newly exposed surface of a manufactured artifact of this material will undergo changes at a known rate and can be dated by the depth of the hydration layer. This method applies only to obsidian so far.

Another aspect of science in archaeology is the problem of locating buried objects prior to excavation. With the aid of a device called the Proton Magnetometer it is possible to locate buried features. Because it depends on a magnetic field it can pick up reactions from metal objects, pottery, kilns, hearths, ditches and pits. In the case of pottery, as the clay cools it becomes magnetised in the direction of the earth's magnetic field at that time and, as the rate of magnetic variation of the earth's field is known, a calculation will enable one to arrive at a date for the pot or kiln. In many ways the proton magnetometer is more satisfactory than resistivity.

It can be seen that these three methods are of great importance for the solution of chronological problems in archaeology. Together with the Radiocarbon dating method and fluorine determination technique scientific dating methods are making chronology much less suspect than previously. Scientific analysis of objects of metal, clay, glass, wood, stone is now a normal proceeding in connection with serious excavation, while the study of skeletal remains found during excavation is helping to throw light on disease in early man, and racial differentiation as indicated by blood groups. Most of these techniques are described in the book "Science in Archaeology".

The general public are probably not aware that there is no combined institute or research centre on a scale sufficient to deal with the whole range of archaeological data and material found during excavations. The Ministry of Public Building and Works have a laboratory for the Ancient Monuments section but they find difficulty in coping with their own finds. The Institute of Archaeology, London University has a department which deals with Conservation and one that deals with environmental archaeology but again these exist mainly for students and research workers of the university. At Oxford is a research laboratory for archaeology and works of art which receives a grant from D.S.I.R. but it is not large enough to deal with the volume of work and does not have certain specialists. At present scientific treatment of finds still depends almost entirely on private arrangements between archaeologists and scientific specialists.

Now that the field of archaeology has become so wide and specialised it becomes even more important that there should be some central pool of scientific knowledge available to archaeologists and scientists alike.

MORE LIGHT ON THE HOMERIC SAGA

Excavations at Pylos during this year have yielded important gold objects from the Middle Bronze Age. Professor Marinatos, director of the excavations, says that the treasure was contemporaneous with that discovered by Schliemann at Mycenae although the workmanship of the Pylos treasure is superior. There are three large wine cups, one 18 inch diadem, several fine ornaments and a quantity of gold leaf embossed with decoration. The finds were in a grave which had been destroyed but, fortunately, the treasure had escaped the notice of robbers. Excavations over five years have brought to light the so-called Palace of Nestor of the period between 1600 and 1530 B.C

TREASURE TROVE. There are reports in the Press from time to time of exciting and valuable finds being made in the normal course of the finder's work. Workers on the land, or on new building sites usually stand the best chance of making such discoveries and these are often financially rewarding. Objects of precious metal are subject to the law of Treasure Trove and must be reported to the Police or the Coroner. For the benefit of members the following notes are provided.

Objects of gold or silver (including coins, plate, and bullion) which have been hidden in the soil or in buildings, and of which the original owner cannot be traced, are Treasure Trove, and by law the property of the Crown. + It is of great importance for historical and archaeological reasons that any such finds should not be concealed, but should be reported and handed over in their entirety to the proper authority; a finder who fails to do this may be guilty of a criminal offence.

The proper authority is the Coroner of the district in which the find is made, for he is the authority who enquires of "Treasure that is found" and "who were the finders" (Coroners Act 1887, section 36).

Anyone, therefore who finds such objects should report them to the Coroner direct, or to the local museum or to the local police. It is always to the finder's advantage to report the find at once, for, as the law is now administered, he receives either the find back, or its full market value, as a reward for doing so. If the Coroner decides that more than one person was concerned in the finding, then the reward may be divided; the reward is made to the finders and not the owner or occupier of the land.

When a find has been declared Treasure Trove it is dealt with as follows: if it is not required for any museum it is not retained, but returned to the finder to dispose of as he likes - the British Museum will arrange to sell the find for him at the best obtainable price. If the find, or any part of it is retained for a museum, the finder is given the full market value of what is retained.

Coins and other ancient objects of copper, bronze or other base metals are not Treasure Trove and finds of this nature need not be reported to the Coroner. There is, however, an obligation for the finder to report his discovery to the owner of the land or building where it is made. The local museum is always glad to hear of such finds and, if they are reported, will be prepared to advise the finder as to its nature and how it may be disposed of.

+ Unless (as in some rare cases) the "Franchise of Treasure Trove" has been expressly granted to a subject for finds from a particular locality, which includes the County Palatinate of Lancaster. Here and in certain Duchy liberties outside the County Palatinate the Franchise is vested in the Queen in right of her Duchy and not in the Crown.

COMMON COIN ENQUIRIES.

Certain coins or similar objects are frequently taken to museums for authentic identification or clarification. Some of these are dealt with below to enable those interested to make their own identification.

The Imitation Spade Guinea is a playing card counter made in imitation of the guineas and half-guineas of George III, issued between 1787 and 1800, nicknamed "spade guineas" from the shape of the shield on the reverse. These counters are made of brass which when burnished may be taken for gold. They are extremely common and have been known to cost 2/6d for 100. The legends should read: GEORGIUS III DEI GRATIA, with reverse M(agniae) B(ritanniae) F(ranciae) ET H(iberniae) REX F(idiei) D(efensor) B(runswicensis) ET L(uneburgensis) D(ux) S(acri) R(omani) I(mperii) A(rchi-) T(hesaurarius) ET E(lector): George, by the Grace of God King of Great Britain, France and Ireland, Defender of the Faith, Duke of Brunswick and Luneburg, High Treasurer and Elector of the Holy Roman Empire. They are often bungled with the date altered. Sometimes they bear the words In Memory of the Good Old Days, or the name of a business firm, or the letters B.I.R.M. for Birmingham.

Another copy of a sovereign is the "TO HANOVER" counter. This is a brass copy of a sovereign of Victoria with the legend VICTORIA REGINA on the obverse instead of the usual form. On the reverse is a crowned horseman accompanied by a three-headed dragon. The legend above is TO HANOVER and the date 1837 is below. This referred to the succession of the Duke of Cumberland to the throne of Hannover. As these pieces resembled sovereigns they were often passed off as such.

Another form of counter is much earlier than those referred to above and are known as RECKONING COUNTERS. Before the introduction of the so-called Arabic

(really Hindu) numerals in the fifteenth century, arithmetical calculations were made in Europe by means of cumbersome Roman numerals. To facilitate the reckoning of accounts metal discs were used in conjunction with a counting-board, or cloth, divided into squares like a chequer-board, the procedure being similar to that used with an abacus. The discs were made of copper or brass and imitated coins in appearance, and often in types. They usually bore legends (frequently with mistakes). At first pious - e.g. Ave Maria, Gracia Plena etc., later they included the maker's name with some homely maxim. These counters (in French jettons ; in German Rechenpfennige) began to be made in the thirteenth century ; at first mostly in France, then increasingly, and finally exclusively, in Germany - Nuremberg being for many years, from the fourteenth century onwards, a principal source of supply. Nuremberg counters frequently bear the names of their makers e.g. Hans Schultes (16th century), Hans Krauenwinckel (end of 16th century) and many others. Foreign reckoning counters were imported into England in large numbers and are frequently found on Medieval sites and in old ecclesiastical buildings from which they sometimes get the name "Abbey Tokens".

BOOKS WORTH READING.

A book long-awaited is "Ancient Europe" by Professor Stuart Piggott (Edinburgh University Press, 42/-). The book is based on Piggott's Rhind Lectures given at the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland in 1962 and contains the synthesis of his views on the main lines of European Prehistory. The book is meant to cater for readers on two levels, the general non-specialist, and the archaeological student. The former may read the text "straight" while the student may use the full references and notes at the end of each chapter. The book begins with the agriculturalists of the Neolithic and progresses through succeeding cultures until the end of the pre-Roman Iron Age. There are fine illustrations, some of which have not appeared before and these enhance a lucid and stimulating text. This book will prove rewarding to anyone who reads it and it represents all that is best in archaeological writing today. When compared with other works of a higher price this one is exceedingly good value.

Stuart Piggott has collaborated with another distinguished prehistorian in "Prehistoric Societies" by Grahame Clerk & Stuart Piggott (Hutchinson, 50/-). This is in a series, under the editorship of the well-known historian, J.H. Plumb, entitled "The History of Human Society". As the title suggests, the work deals with Man's development as a social animal and traces the growth of his technical skill and his organisation of Society. The field is wide in this book which begins with the evolution of the Hominids and the emergence of "Man the Toolmaker". Professor Clark makes use of his great knowledge of the development of stone industries in the hunter/fisher communities of Palaeolithic and Mesolithic man. This development is traced outside Europe and one is enabled to see the spread of cultures on a world-scale in a way which banishes all insular conceptions at once. Although the book covers some of the same ground as "Ancient Europe" valuable chapters on the New World, Asia and Europe give the reader the "wide view" of human cultures.

The recent lecture on "Heraldry" given by Mr Kuhlicke to the Society must have aroused the interest on many people. A new book on "Heraldic Design" by Heather Child is the sort of production to further that interest. Although heraldry plays only a small part today there is still a great deal to be seen around us. Miss Child begins at once by showing the position of the heraldic designer of today and follows this by outlining the "grammar" of the subject in a most comprehensive fashion. The illustrations are good and there are some first-class photographs of designs in all media. Part three of the book contains a step-by-step account of designing arms with an explanation of current examples. Although the book is a little expensive it is the kind of work which one could have on one's shelves with full confidence. "Heraldic Design" is published by G. Bell & Sons, 65/-.

Prehistoric Societies and Heraldic Design are both in the Letchworth Public Library.

Your attention is drawn to the HERTFORDSHIRE LOCAL HISTORY COUNCIL which fosters a wide interest in Hertfordshire and its history by organising lectures and encouraging exhibitions ; provides a common forum for individual local history workers, societies, local authorities, museums, libraries, and all those whose interests touch Hertfordshire history ; co-operates with other bodies in trying to preserve Hertfordshire's heritage of buildings and landscape ; publishes "Hertfordshire Past & Present" and occasional papers. Hon. Sec. 2, Vigors Croft, Hatfield.