

**PONTEFRACT & DISTRICT
ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY**

Founded 1957

(AFFILIATED TO THE YORKSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY)

**ANNUAL JOURNAL
and
REPORT**

1964

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FOREWORD

by OUR PRESIDENT

It is significant that with each passing year the Annual Journal grows bigger as the activities of the Society increase.

The last twelve months have been very full ones for the Society. Not only has it played a prominent part in excavations — namely, at St. John's Priory, St. Richard's Friary, the Castle, and the Roman site at Drax — but much has been learned by the younger members in field-work during weekend walking tours which included visits to places of historical and archaeological interest. The citizens of Pontefract should also be grateful for the amount of voluntary work which is being done by the Society at the Museum.

It is encouraging to see so many young members, in these days of numerous counter-attractions, who are prepared to devote their time and energy to Society activities. Surveying, the drawing of plans, the excellent photographic results, and the collection of evidence, are all subjects in which young members are becoming proficient. General neatness on a site, and in particular the trowelling of some members, is worthy of the highest recommendation. May the good work continue throughout the coming year.

In conclusion, on behalf of the Dales National Park, or any part of the countryside for that matter, will you help in the war against litter when you go on your tours? The slogan is TIDY UP THE TOPS. If you bag any new peaks, please bring down a little more rubbish than you take up. After all, a couple of rusty cans and a broken beer- or milk-bottle will not make much difference to the weight of that rucksack!

EDITORIAL

In this column last year I mentioned the indifference of most Pontefract people to the history of their town. Many people have not been to the Castle at all, and most have not visited it "for years." To these I would say, "Come and see it this summer. Walk round with one of our guides (see back cover for details) and then visit the museum. Take your time, and I guarantee that you will enjoy yourself, for our Castle is unique in having gardens as well as a history unequalled in England except by that of the Tower of London."

Although the inhabitants do not realise it, Pontefract is already a minor tourist centre. Each summer, and to a certain extent through the rest of the year, visitors from all over the country, and many from abroad, pass through the Castle gates.

Of course we do not want to turn our town into a tourist centre in the accepted meaning of the word, but a little awareness and help from local people, and especially from tradesmen, would benefit both the visitor and the town.

E. HOULDER.

A RESCUE EXCAVATION ON THE SITE OF THE DOMINICAN FRIARY OF ST. RICHARD, PONTEFRACT

by K. WILSON

A rescue excavation took place on the site of the Blackfriars Friary during the weekends of August, September and October, 1963. The site, which lies to the south of Pontefract General Infirmary, is to be built over with extensions to the Infirmary. Permission to excavate was given by the Pontefract and Castleford Hospital Management Committee, and the excavation was directed by Mr. K. Wilson of Abbey House Museum, Kirkstall. Volunteers were drawn from the Pontefract Archaeological Society.

HISTORY

The Friary was founded about 1256 by Edmund de Laci and received patronage from Edward I, II and III. It was surrendered to the Royal Commissioners on November 26, 1538, and its possessions sold. The area of the Friary and grounds covered about 1½ acres. Part of the site to the S.E. was planted with an orchard before 1650, as confirmed by the Will of Alice Austwick, who was buried in the orchard that year.⁽¹⁾ At a later date liquorice was grown just south of the orchard, the trenches for which ruthlessly disturbed the foundations of buildings. Excavation took place within the orchard. The remainder of the site lies under the Infirmary garden, and under the modern bungalow and the Valley Gardens, where it was not possible to excavate.

EXCAVATION

Excavation revealed what is believed to be part of the south wall of the church with a wall abutted on it and running off at right-angles 70ft. to the south. Including the post-Dissolution period there were eight distinct phases.

(1). The digging of a foundation trench running E.-W. down to bed-rock⁽²⁾ and the insertion of roughly-dressed sandstone foundations. These appeared to be the foundations of a timber structure. C13 pottery was found at the bottom of the foundation trench.

(2). A second trench was dug at right-angles to Phase I, and a second wall abutted on it and ran 70ft. to the south. This was 3ft. thick and turned West at its southern extremity. The S.W. corner had nine courses of roughly-dressed stone, the bottom course being 8ft. from the modern surface.

(3). Another trench was dug E.-W. This was wider and cut through Phase I. Well-dressed ashlar had then been placed on top of the original foundations and packed in with clay. The clay contained C14 pottery, and this reinforcement of the foundations was probably for the stone church

which replaced the timber one. Only the south wall face was revealed, as the Infirmary garden lies to the North.

(4). The wall in Phase II had been cut through close to where it abutted on Phase I and a drain inserted. The drain contained C14 pottery but was constructed of roofing slabs, indicating post-Dissolution work.

(5). Phase II wall again cut in three places for the insertion of burials. In each case the burials were at right-angles to the wall with heads and feet protruding from the wall to W. and E.⁽³⁾ The remains of one were resting on roofing slabs and a piece of C17 pottery.

(6). The wall of the church in Phase III had a brick wall built on top of it. The original wall had probably fallen inwards and this brick wall was built to contain the rubble beneath the Infirmary garden.

(7). Another drain of roofing slabs was built over the drain in Phase IV.

(8). Further destruction to the wall in Phase II, when three courses of stones were removed and the area excavated for a greenhouse boiler.

To the S. of the corner mentioned in Phase II the wall of another building was found. This contained a doorway facing N. The wall disappeared under the bungalow garden to the W. and petered out among tree roots and liquorice trenches to the E.

To the S.E. of the area was a sub-rectangular depression about 50ft. wide and at least 8ft. deep in the centre. This had been filled in and the ground levelled off in the C18 and had the appearance of a fish-pond. Work had to be abandoned at 8ft. because of the danger of falling baulks.

CONCLUSIONS

The buildings were of millstone grit with carved C14 window mullion of magnesian limestone. These had been glazed with stained glass similar to that found on the St. John's Priory site. Stone roofing slabs had been used, varying from 2ft. x 1ft. to 9ins. x 6ins. They had been held in place by iron nails.

FINDS

A full analysis of the pottery has not yet been completed but it ranges from mid-C13 to C17. The base of one large thick earthenware vessel was thickly coated with calcium carbonate, like the "fur" inside a kettle. There was one small piece of late Cistercian ware. Other finds included a bronze pin, a jetton, roof-tile nails and deer bones.

Over the ten weekends' excavating, fifty people took part. The average number per day was 14. The largest number for one day was 20 and the smallest was 11.

Footnotes :

- (1). "The Blackfriars of Pontefract" by R. Holmes.
- (2). Triassic sandstone.
- (3). Two of the remains were probably the bodies of Alice Austwick and her husband.

SECRETARIAL REPORT

by K. GARDINER

How does one set about reporting a year's activities when they have been so many and varied? When I say varied I do not mean that we have had very much in the way of new activities; indeed, we seem to have carried on with the usual things — lectures, digs, rambles, socials, etc. — but somehow there seems to have been a difference this year. More people have had a hand in the running of the Society.

Those members who have been with the Society since its foundation will no doubt remember how I used to appeal for members to take a more active part in the running of their Society. I still do, but at last it seems as if my appeals have been successful. Please study this journal carefully. Look at the number of contributors, and then I am sure that there is no need for me to go into details of what has been going on over the year.

For a moment I thought I was going to be able to give a popular "vote-winning" report. It is all too easy to cover up the faults and say nothing about them. In spite of the good things above, there is something which all members should know about. Membership is down, and attendances at lectures are also down. Now I am fully aware that people other than members read this journal and that some members will no doubt say that as this is the case, we should not let other people know about our bad points. But why try to hide such things as lost membership? Every Society has this problem from time to time. I believe it is a good thing to report the truth, but at the same time I would assure all readers, members or otherwise, that we do not intend to let these problems get the better of us. We intend to do something about it, and perhaps non-members reading this might care to come along and help us by joining the Society.

I could not possibly close this report without saying what a splendid job the Museum team have done during the winter. Though there is still a lot of work to be done, the place certainly looks far different from the "Chamber of Horrors" described by the "Pontefract and Castleford Express" some years ago. If I were asked to state which has been the most outstanding activity during the year, I would without doubt say the work in the Museum. I am sure that those in charge of the work would wish me to say "thank you" to all those who have helped in so many different ways.

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REPORT ON THE WORK IN PONTEFRAC T CASTLE 1963

by K. GARDINER

The main centre of activity this season has been on the Swillington Tower, and a separate report on this work will follow when the work there has been completed.

As much time was spent on the bailey wall it was possible to study the construction in more detail than is generally possible. Much damage has been caused in the last decade by tree roots and general deterioration, and quite a lot of the wall has been interfered with at various times.

It has now been suggested that the bailey wall was cut through by the building of the later King's tower, though the evidence for this is small as the wall was altered or repaired for some yards westward from the Tower, probably sometime before the Civil War. It was interfered with again during the Victorian period, when a great deal of "Restoration Work" was carried out. There is still doubt concerning the date of the original wall, but from the general construction and thickness it would appear to be Late Norman or Early English. It is hoped that repair work will continue in the coming year, and that more members will assist in this work.

FUTURE WORK

Depending upon the number of members available and of course on whether or not we are granted permission to carry on by the Corporation, we hope to extend the work somewhat this season. Pending this, we hope to begin work in the Piper-Gascoigne tower area where recent falling of the pathway has almost blocked up the postern gate. In the early stages the work will consist of rescuing the stones from the fallen wall, and preparing them and the site for restoration work later on. The work on the upper terrace will also be extended to a line between the wall and the Swillington Tower, but after this the work will have to stop until the repairs to the wall have caught up with the digging. Down below on the lower terrace it is hoped this year to concentrate on the formation of the slope, and by the end of the season the original idea of terrace and slope should be complete in this section. The investigation of the Swillington Tower stairway will continue in conjunction with the extension to the upper terrace where the supposed stair should meet the bailey wall.

As this report goes to print, a small committee has been formed to deal with all society activities in the Castle. This consists of Mr. Morris, Mr. Carney and myself. In future all responsibility for organising work, guiding, and open days will be shouldered by this committee.

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JUNIOR SOCIETY REPORT

by K. STUBBS

This year Junior members have taken an active part in many local excavations, commencing at St. John's Priory at Easter, moving to the Castle in Summer, and finishing at St. Richard's in the Autumn.

In August quite a few of our members joined Mr. K. Wilson at Drax, where they were tracing the remains of a Roman Villa in the middle of a potato field. In September the potato field was forsaken for an orchard behind Pontefract Infirmary where we hoped to locate the remains of the Friary of Saint Richard.

During the Winter we gave our trowels a rest and took up paint brushes and mops and headed for the Castle Museum. Under the direction of Mr. Carney and Mr. Morris the Juniors have worked on the show cases and exhibits, turning the museum from a local disgrace into a show place. We only hope that the public appreciate the many hours spent with paint and brushes, and make more use of the museum in the coming season.

In the summer the Junior Committee organised a bus trip to Richmond Castle and Easby Abbey. The weather was fine and we had a very enjoyable day, calling at Middleham Castle on the way home.

The Juniors would like to take this opportunity to thank the Senior Society for their co-operation and encouragement over the last year, and hope that next season may be even more rewarding.

THE THIRD ANNUAL EXCAVATION AT DRAX, SELBY

by K. WILSON

The third annual excavation on the Roman site at Drax took place during July and August, 1963. The nucleus of volunteers was drawn from the Pontefract Archaeological Society; others came from as far afield as Sunderland and London. After three days when it was almost too hot to work, the remaining three weeks' work was as usual hampered by bad weather. This season the site lay under a crop of potatoes. These had to be lifted, by kind permission of the farmer (Mr. Robert Thompson), before work could commence. They were duly eaten and enjoyed by the volunteers.

SUMMARY OF 1961 AND 1962 EXCAVATIONS

The excavations in 1961 revealed a number of wall foundations and robber trenches forming a rectangular building of four rooms orientated N.E. - S.W., with a smaller room extending to the N.E. The overall dimensions were 78ft. x 27ft. (Site A). A second area was sampled 150ft. E.S.E. of Site A. Here was found a large tumbled mass of undressed stones between and below which were pieces of iron, nails, iron-ore, charcoal, coarse and burnished R.B. pottery, and some pieces of plain and decorated Samian ware (Site B). In 1962 a third area was investigated (Site C). Here no stone foundations were found, but there were traces of a wooden building superimposed upon the clay foundations of an earlier structure. Phase I was definitely Roman in origin, while Phase II consisted of large post holes of a mediaeval building, probably the Chapel of St. Wilfred, but this was not proved.

EXCAVATIONS IN 1963

Work was resumed on Site A. A sixth room was found turned off at right-angles to the S.E. of the original rectangular building, making the building the shape of a letter 'L'. Running parallel with the long arm of the 'L' on the inside and a few feet away, was another wall and post-holes which appear to be the supports for a verandah facing into the courtyard. In the centre of the courtyard what is probably a well was found on the last day of the excavation.

No definite floor levels have yet been found; so it is possible that the floors within the buildings were of timber. The pottery, however, gives one a good indication of the date when the building was in use. This consists of plain and decorated Samian ware from Central and Eastern Gaul, and a C4 imitation Dragendorff 38; coarse pottery includes colour-coated ware and cooking pots, two of Huntcliffe type. Fragments of mortaria include some from the Warwickshire kilns circa A.D. 250-320, flanged Crambeck circa A.D. 320-370, and Nene Valley late C3 and early C4. There were also some Spanish amphorae.

FIELD WORK

This year a certain amount of field-work was carried out during the time when it was too wet in the trenches to dig. The ridge and furrows in the Horse Pasture, a field adjoining The Stannels,⁽¹⁾ were counted and measured and drawn onto a map. These continue across the road and into the orchard of Scurff Hall,⁽²⁾ indicating that the road is later than the ridges and furrows. The heads of the ridge and furrows coincide with the lip of the moat around Scurff Hall, indicating that the moat came first. The present house of Scurff Hall is C17, with later additions up to mid-Victorian, but probably built upon foundations contemporary with the moat.

The clay sub-soil over the whole area is laid down in a series of sinclines and anticlines, and not on a level horizon, the troughs of the sinclines being about 1ft. deep. Light grey sand had been brought in by flooding in pre-Roman times, and it is through this that the R.B. builders dug their foundations. Flooding in the post-Roman era, through the warping, has brought in more sand and silt — thereby sandwiching the datable Roman structure between two geological strata — the whole being overlaid by the later topsoil. Sections show excellent examples of the leeching of the topsoil into the B horizon.⁽³⁾

FUTURE PLANS

Next season it is hoped to continue the investigation of Site A in order to find the third side of the courtyard and excavate the well. As there will be a late crop of wheat on the field it may not be possible to dig until September, which will mean weekend digging only. It is hoped, however, that volunteers will be able to come, and as far as possible transport will be provided to and from Snaith.

Footnotes :

- (1). The Stannels — Stone Hills. ("Place-names of the W.R. of Yorks." part iv, by A. H. Smith).
- (2). Scurff Hall — skuror — skurth — a cutting or water channel. ("Place-names of the W.R. of Yorks." part iv, by A. H. Smith).
- (3). "Soils for the Archaeologist" by I. Cornwall.

MUSEUM REPORT

by T. J. CARNEY

Work began in the Castle Museum in November 1963, and it is hoped that the greater part will be completed before Easter 1964. Those organising the work found the enthusiastic response to the call for helpers particularly gratifying and wish to thank those members who have taken part and also those who have loaned tools or provided materials.

The old dark-brown museum cases have been structurally modified and re-painted, and the decoration of part of the building has commenced. It is hoped that this section of the work will be completed by Pontefract Corporation in the near future.

The work of cleaning and restoration has been carried out on those exhibits most urgently requiring it; the documents in particular have received expert treatment at Leeds Museum. A number of displays have already been arranged, and more exhibits are expected to arrive on loan during the next few months. The finds from recent excavations carried out by the Society are also to be displayed, and we are confident that in the next two or three years we shall be able to build up a really fine museum collection.

SOCIETY LIBRARIAN'S REPORT

by K. STUBBS

Last year the Society founded its own Library of excavation reports, photographs and other archaeological data. To date, the library contains only about one dozen books and many photographs, but there is also a list of about a hundred books offered by members for loan within the Society, and also a list of some members' photographic records. It is through this loan service that the library is proving most useful, and I would be pleased if other members would forward me a list of books or photographs which they are willing to circulate within the Society.

I would also like to thank members who have donated books and photographs to the library, especially our President and Mrs. Wilson, and to invite all members to make more use of this service in future.

EXCURSIONS

The Society has now an Excursions Secretary. I am sure that those who went on our summer trip to Richmond and Easby will agree on the efficiency of our new Committee member. If anyone has any ideas for future excursions will they please forward them to —

The Excursions Secretary
c/o Publications Secretary
Eroan
27 Northfield Drive
Prail Lane
Pontefract

ST. JOHN'S PRIORY EXCAVATIONS

by C. V. BELLAMY, B.Sc., M.I.Biol.

The 1963 excavations completed the clearance of the sacristy on the north side of the early choir, and uncovered the outside walls of the latest east end of the church.

The sacristy was shown to be a rectangular building thirty-five feet long and twenty-one feet six inches wide in two bays. It had a flag floor and contained a number of burials underneath this. Those which had been obvious at the time of the dissolution were disturbed by vandals seeking valuables. Others, of earlier date, were overlooked.

A spiral stair was built into the south-east corner of the building, where the eastern wall butted against the outside angle of the choir-aisle apse. On the east side of the same angle, a further wall proved to be the northern side of the latest presbytery, and this was traced eastwards through three bays. At offset level this wall is five feet six inches wide, on very substantial foundations, with massive external buttresses.

The corresponding wall for the south side of this late building had been located in earlier years, and was now traced to a corresponding length. Additional trenches were now positioned to span the late presbytery between the easternmost buttresses, and these showed that the east end was aisled on both north and south sides. The trenches revealed the foundations of pillars of the aisle arcades, each represented by blocks of masonry about seven feet square, set nine feet from the outside walls. They were eighteen feet apart, giving a total width of fifty feet.

A light wall, about two feet wide, crossed the presbytery between these pillars, butting against each, and set towards the eastern edges. From this, other foundations indicated the position of a platform some twelve feet six inches long and projecting about four feet from the western face of the cross wall. These structures clearly represent the foundations of the Altar and Reredos of the later church.

Excavation in front of the Altar is reserved for 1964, but the 1963 trenches did give an opportunity to examine the floor make-up behind the reredos, and in the choir aisles. The area immediately behind the reredos contained numerous burials including one accompanied by a Bulla bearing the name of Pope Innocent VI (1352-62).

In the south aisle we found the remains of an earlier extension to the church, marked by an outside wall lying some five feet below the choir aisle floor. A corresponding wall was also found under the north choir aisle. These structures show that the original "parallel apses" termination was replaced by a lengthened east end, about thirty-two feet wide, the eastern limits of which have not yet been reached. The third enlargement of the east end is represented by the outside walls, with associated altar and reredos just described. This latter building is probably three bays longer than the original choir, or five bays in all - approximately one hundred feet from the chancel arch.

Excavations south of the presbytery, and in the southern range of the lesser cloister, hold promise of interesting developments in 1964.

Hon. Secretary of the Society : G. Gardiner, 38 Tanshelf Drive, Pontefract
Publications Secretary :
E. Houlder, Eroan, 27 Northfield Drive, Prail Lane, Pontefract

INFORMATION FOR VISITORS

We should like to draw the attention of visitors and intending visitors to the service offered by our Society. For some years now we have been able to act as guides to the various sites in the town, especially during the summer weekends, but to be on the safe side, drop a S.A.E. to our secretary and he will do all he can to help you.

With regard to visits to the Castle — the dungeons are not normally open to the public, but arrangements can be made, and intending visitors should write to the town clerk for permission to view them. However, it should be understood that he will only grant such permission on the understanding that all persons enter the dungeons at their own risk and are accompanied by a recognised guide. When making your plans for your outing, please allow at least three hours for a visit to the Castle, as to see the ruins, museum and dungeons takes quite a time (that is, if you wish to see everything).

The Castle is not the only place of interest, of course — there is also the Hermitage, an underground chamber cut out by Peter the Hermit, consisting of a spiral staircase leading to a small, now unfortunately blocked up, living room, with a second stairway leading to the Oratory with a stone altar. The Hermitage is underneath the Pontefract General Infirmary and therefore is not open to the public, but arrangements can be made by permission of the Matron (provided the time of the visit is convenient).

The site of the Priory of St. John is well worth a visit, too, when excavations are in progress, but not otherwise as the site is all underground and at the moment there is little hope of its being opened up permanently.

The church of All Saints has many interesting features and is quite near the Castle. Partly ruined during the sieges, the Church has the unusual feature of having the Transepts and Choir only in use, the Nave and Aisles being in ruins.

St. Giles's Church is not as old as All Saints'. It stands in the market place near yet another local oddity — the Butter Cross with its pump, the pump being given to the town by Elizabeth the First.

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