

PONTARCH.

AN OCCASIONAL NEWSLETTER FOR MEMBERS OF THE
PONTEFRACT & DISTRICT ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY.

Edited by ERIC HOULDER. Past President.

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SPRING/SUMMER 1987.

INTRODUCTION.

When the Society was first formed, thirty years ago, attempts were made to publish a regular *NEWSLETTER*. These early newsletters varied considerably in style and format according to how much money was available and how much news there was to publish. As I write, I have a copy of the December 1959 issue in front of me. It is a lavishly printed A5 magazine with a photograph of All Saints Church inside the front cover. Later issues tended to become cheaper and smaller as the money ran out!

During the 1960s, a Gestetner duplicator was purchased in an attempt to maintain a regular publication, but this never seemed to work for very long. As far as I can ascertain, the last newsletter was published in about 1965.

With the advent of modern technology in the form of word-processors, photocopying, etc., it is hoped that the Society can maintain this little publication as a line of communication with its members.

There is, of course, a hitch! In order to keep this newsletter coming out to you, the members, the Editor needs material to publish. Please send articles, book reviews, enquiries, letters to the Editor, E.Houlder LRPS., 31, Fairview, Carleton, Pontefract, WF8 3NT. Do not worry if your English is a bit rusty or your spelling not too good. All these things can be corrected. The important thing is to keep material coming in. We would also like to hear from you if you possess, or have access to a word processor, and are willing to word-process the occasional issue.

So there we have it! This pilot issue is to test the water, so to speak. If the response is right, others will follow. It is up to YOU. E.Houlder.

THE BOX LANE SITE.

During November, the Society arranged a rescue dig at very short notice on a site at the top of Box Lane. The report on this has been circulated, but if you missed the meetings when it was given out, please contact the Secretary.

Two of the members who took part in the dig remembered an occasion nearly thirty years before when they recorded a skeleton exposed in the cliff face very close to where the recent excavations took place. This event was recorded in the Society's very first *Annual Journal and Report*, published in 1961. We reproduce it here for the benefit of those members, the majority now, who will not have access to a copy:-

St. John's Priory, Cliffs Skeleton.

Just above the Priory field is a small range of cliffs about twenty to thirty feet high, and it was on top of these that we found the skeleton of a man, aged forty to fifty. As the burial had partly slipped over the cliff edge, the skeleton was disturbed. It was also extremely difficult to excavate. The diggers had to hang on to tree roots with one hand whilst digging with the other. The finding of an arrow-head between the fifth and sixth ribs caused quite a stir. Though in poor condition it has been dated about the twelfth century. The skull and arrow are now in the castle museum.

ANNUAL JOURNAL & REPORT, 1960-1. Page 8. No author credit.

Following our recent rescue dig, Mr. Houlder gave a short report on it to the CBA (4) Symposium in February. On returning he received a 'phone call from Miss Love, (Committee Member), to the effect that the building workers on the site had encroached upon a portion of the Scheduled area. The following day, he and Mr. Evison (Chairman) investigated. Below is the report on what they found.

REPORT ON THE INVESTIGATION OF BUILDING ACTIVITIES
ON THE BOX LANE SITE.

During Saturday the seventh of February 1987, Miss E. Love telephoned and left a message that builders on the Box Lane site had disturbed a number of graves. At 10-30 am on the following morning, in the company of Mr. R. Evison, I investigated.

The area where the previous excavation had been carried out had been scraped level, and the builders had also been active on the site of the demolished malt-kilns. At this spot, their machines had encroached into the face of the scheduled area (directly facing Box Lane) and had disturbed seven or eight graves. A number of human bones, including several femurs of a number of individuals, and other extra-cranial bones, had been gathered into one spot and partially covered with a small sheet of polythene.

In the face of the cutting above, seven or eight intrusions were visible in section, all displaying the obvious signs of being graves, aligned east-west. Intact or broken leg bones were protruding from most, whilst the vault of a skull had been crudely pressed into one grave. Further investigation revealed a number of fragments of cranium and mandible on a concrete block; they had clearly been placed there with the rest of a skull, and left when the skull was removed.

I took a number of photographs, and with Mr. Evison, gathered the exposed bones into a bag to remove them from the attentions of the children who were playing on the site. On arrival at home, I immediately telephoned Tony Sumpter of the County Archaeology Service to report the situation.

Eric Houlder. 8/2/87.

THE BOX LANE SITE (CONTINUED)

The skeletal remains were subsequently taken to Dr. Manchester's Department at Bradford University with a copy of the above report.

As we go to press, there is news that the Unit expect to do some more excavation on the site. Those members who have indicated that they are willing to help will be notified by telephone.

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COMPUTERISATION.

For some time there has been concern that some members are not getting proper opportunity to take part in all society activities. We are now in the process of remedying that situation. Members will shortly receive a rather complicated form which they are requested to fill in only if they wish to become involved in investigatory work.

Eventually, the information will be computerised so that when emergencies arise like the recent one at Box Lane, it will be a simple matter to contact all those members who are available and have the requisite skills.

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TRAINING COURSE?

In the first few years of the Society's existence, frequent classes were held to train members in basic archaeological techniques. Demand for these fell, and the classes were discontinued. Recently, there has been an upsurge in interest in archaeology, and this short article is an attempt to ascertain whether there would be interest in a new short training course. If you are interested, please contact a member of the Committee, or write to the Secretary, Mrs. P. Wigglesworth, c/o The Museum, Salter Row.

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ST. JOHN'S PRIORY.

With the passing of time, interest in St. John's Priory at Pontefract has increased. Excavations began in 1957 and only finished when Mr. Bellamy, the site Director died. At one time the site had the distinction of being the second longest continuous excavation in Britain, beaten only by Wharrah Percy which, incidently, is also in Yorkshire!

As a result of numerous requests, the Further Education department has arranged a weekend course on St. John's to take place on:-

June 13th & 14th,
in Pontefract Library.

The conference will be led by Mr. J. Whitehead, and Mr. E. Houlder will speak about the archaeological importance of

the site. There will also be a visit to another Cluniac monastery, on the Sunday. Further details can be obtained from Mr. Whitehead.

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BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO SITE PHOTOGRAPHY.

by Eric Houlder, LRPS.

In the next few issues, I hope to give a few hints and tips to help those members who are interested in this important aspect of our discipline. Judging by the number of cameras which nowadays appear on sites, the time appears to be right.

Photography is one of several recording methods used on sites, and is important because unlike the others, it produces an objective record which has not been subjected to the thought processes of an individual beforehand. Because of this, it is an important part of the site photographer's duty to ensure that the feature which he/she is recording is properly prepared so that the record will be as impartial as possible. This preparation takes the form of cleaning; of dampening features to bring out the colours; and of differential scraping to emphasise certain aspects.

This cannot be skimped. On the big Ministry of Works sites of the fifties and sixties it was common to spend a couple of days just preparing a feature for photography. When all was ready, the photographer would take up his stance behind the camera, and looking through it, direct the workers to remove all extraneous tools etc. from the field of view. He/she would then direct the area supervisor in the laying out of ranging poles to act as scales.

Little has changed today, except that we rarely have the time to take more than a few hours to clean the feature. Nevertheless, a good job can still be done if the effort is made. For those who wish to follow up this theme, I recommend the first, and still the best book on site photography,

Photography for Archaeologists,
by M.B. Cookson,
London 1954.

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Prepared using Locoscript on an ANSTRAD PCV 8256, chiefly in 10 pitch characters, and printed by reduction.

All contributions should be sent to the Editor via Pontefract Museum, or to 31, Fairview, Carleton, Pontefract, WF8 3NT. The Society reserves the right to edit or shorten contributions.

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C.1987.