

PONTARCH.

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

Edited by Eric Houlder, Past President.

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EDITORIAL.

During the last year we have lost two of our oldest and most respected members. Donald C. Lodge joined the Society shortly after its foundation, and quickly showed himself to be a talented and hardworking amateur archaeologist. He served in nearly every Committee position during his twenty nine years in the Society. As a mark of respect and affection, the Society is erecting a plaque in his memory at the entrance to the Hermitage.

Charles Baines also served in many Committee positions during his twenty years membership. Charles did most of his digging before the war, and worked with some of the prominent archaeologists of the day. In the Society, he will be best remembered for having first discovered the Roman Villa (now ploughed out) in the field at the top of the Wentbridge cutting. Though unable to join in the more strenuous work of archaeology, his experience and knowledge were always at the service of the Society, and your editor will always feel a debt of gratitude towards him.

Our sympathies are extended to Mrs. Margaret Lodge and Mrs. Eileen Baines.

E. HOULDER.

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CAMPSITES I HAVE KNOWN.

By a Member.

In thirty years of archaeology, more than twenty with a camera of some kind, I have lived in all sorts of places. Looking back, I now wish that I had taken a picture of each campsite at the time. Of course in those days the impressions were so vivid that it seemed as if they would stay in the memory forever. Unfortunately that has not been the case, so I decided to set down some of the more interesting and amusing memories before they faded away.

I remember one site (in the early seventies) which on arrival presented the impression of a Somme battlefield. Mud was thickly plastered all over in such depth that some of the unfortunate diggers lost shoes *without realising* it. There was one tap, but it was at the wrong side of the mud, as was the *elsan*. Luckily, we were forewarned, and decamped to an excellent field behind the local pub with clean toilets, fresh water, and the public bar within easy reach!

Another site we dug about the same time was in idyllic surroundings, apparently, situated amongst pine trees on the edge of a pretty river. As I remember, the diggers were a particularly sociable lot, and on at least one evening we all clubbed together to buy dozens of frozen chickens, sausages etc. from the local supermarket. We then barbecued the lot on an old wrought-iron gate over a wood fire. On

that same site I awoke one morning to the sound of rustling in our waste-box which was just inside the awning of the tent. Peering out, I saw a little creature straight off a *Babycham* bottle with its nose in the box. The following morning my wife, hearing a similar sound, carefully edged to the entrance in the hope of seeing the bambi. This time it was a bunch of rats, and she woke me with a piercing scream!

During the very early sixties, we dug a Romano British small farming settlement close to where Drax power-station now stands. Out there, the land is very flat and it is no unusual occurrence to see a sea-going ship apparently moving across the fields. One day we held an open day for the locals. An old farm-labourer was regaling us with local history.

"Did tha know," he said, "that 'Great Danes cem up that theer river?' !!

Our director asked politely if they stuffed their long ears inside the horns on their helmets, but this witticism was lost on our historian.

A few years later, the dig was on a Roman road on the outskirts of Leeds. The spot was really idyllic, with trees and a small stream. H.Q. was a caravan, with the diggers in tents around it. Each morning we filled the water-container from the stream, and during the tea-breaks we filled the kettle from the same source. One evening after work, a couple of us walked upstream to try and find the source of the beck. Imagine our horror when we found that it came through a farm cess-pit! Nobody came to any harm as a result of drinking that water. The idyllic spot is now, of course, covered with houses.

Quite the nicest camp-site for a dig was during the first couple of seasons of the *Last Sutton Hoo* dig. This would be 1967-8. The Director and his wife were staying at the Wood Hall Hotel, Shottisham. We lesser mortals were camping in the walled orchard behind the hotel. All around us apples and pears were beginning to ripen, but the best part was yet to be revealed. In the centre of the orchard was a large marquee, and every evening dinner was served straight from the hotel kitchen! Talk about a Gourmet Excavation! Most evenings we walked into Shottisham to the *Sorrel Horse*, where the landlord and his wife made us welcome. There was a juke-box in the back room, and for some reason it would only play *The Carnival is Over*. To this day, that tune brings back memories of Sutton Hoo, as do the calls of wood-pigeons which were common in the orchard.

We had several 'does' in the *Sorrel Horse*. Mrs Markham baked all sorts of goodies and the diggers, nearly a hundred of us one year, sat around drinking, eating, and singing.

Looking back, it is often the evenings in some local hostelry which stand out, sometimes more than the actual excavations. My pictures of these times are few, regrettably. Now and then I take them out and wallow in nostalgia, which puts a rosy glow onto most occasions. We still chuckle about the time our tent was pitched in the corner of a potato field in Northants. One day the farmer sprayed the field to kill the tops, and the tent was invaded by thousands of particularly long-legged spiders. Though funny now, the incident nearly caused a divorce!

Reprinted from the Summer 1987 issue of *THE PROOF*. Have you any memories worth retailing? Contact the Editor if you have. P.S. Readers should recognise a few of the characters in the above story!

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A PERTINENT QUOTE.

Peering into the face of a skeleton, an archaeologist cannot help but be aware that he is eyeball to eye socket with someone who knew the answers to many, if not all, of the questions he is asking. For my part, I know that although the bones may be those of a person whose culture rendered him superficially different from me, a cold wind still made him shiver, alcohol still fuddled his senses, and in the night a woman's arms made yesterday and tomorrow unimportant. In these, and in virtually every other human emotion, we are alike. Our hands touch, but the silence of eternity holds us apart.

I. Noel Hume. *Martin's Hundred*. Gollancz.

Those of us who have had experience digging skeletons will appreciate Ivor Noel Hume's sentiments.

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COMPUTERISED DIGGERS LIST.

This does not seem to be getting off the ground. At the time of writing, only one form has been returned, and this was not filled in!

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HERMITAGE RE-OPENING.

Following a lot of hard work by members, the Hermitage was re-opened by our President, P. Mayes, BA., FSA., in the presence of Mrs. Margaret Lodge. The main event of the morning, 4th July, was the unveiling of a plaque about the Hermitage, and dedicated to Don Lodge who spent so much time and energy in it. Many local dignitaries were present to witness the ceremony, and it was rounded off by excellent refreshments.

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The dignitaries and friends of the Society standing on the Hospital steps after the unveiling of the plaque. Front left, our President, with Mrs. Lodge.

NEW ARCHAEOLOGY COURSE FOR PONTEFRACT.

After many years, there is to be an evening class in archaeology in Pontefract. Organised by the F.E. Dept., the course will be at King's School on Wednesday evenings, and lead to the qualification of GCSE(M). Course tutor will be Eric Houlder, Past President, Past Secretary, etc. of the Society. Enrolment from 7-00pm on Sept. 16th @ King's.

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LACK OF SUPPORT.

In the first issue of this newsletter, an appeal was made for articles, news, and help in its production. As yet the response has been nil! There must be someone out there who has something to say? Who goes on the coach excursions? A short report on one of these would be appreciated by those who do not go.

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