

PONTARCH

An Occasional Newsletter
for members of PONTEFRACT &
DISTRICT ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOC.

NUMBER NINE

Autumn 1989

EDITORIAL ADDRESS:- 31, Fairview, Carleton, PONTEFRACT. WF8 3NT.

END OF ARCHAEOLOGY IN SCHOOLS!

After much deliberation, the Government's History Working Group for the National Curriculum has come up with a document which, if accepted, will effectively remove most archaeology from the Secondary curriculum!

Those of us who were at school in the forties, fifties, or before, will remember with some sorrow how the majority of History was taught in those days. Your Editor for one, will never forget the names of Castlereigh (is that the spelling?) and Canning, though mercifully the details of their foreign policy has long since been replaced in his memory with more interesting and more relevant material. Unfortunately, the schoolchildren of the Nineties and after will have and yet more totally irrelevant and boring political history rammed down their throats.

The result will be the same; the majority of them will be put off History for life and never discover the fascination of real History, and its companion, Archaeology.

It is perhaps typical of certain government thinking that the Working Group was chaired by the owner of a stately home (profit motive?), contained just two experts on childrens' learning, and was largely

composed of none-experts! What is even more scandalous is the fact that there was not a single Archaeologist on the Group!!

Amongst the muddled thinking and irrelevant material, is the the chronological approach, so that the hapless Infant Teacher will have to put across complex matter and sophisticated concepts which until now have been left until later. As a result, Secondary teachers will be largely teachers of recent History with little opportunity to use the more interesting material provided by Archaeology.

With an eye to the siting of the next Japanese car factory, a great chunk of Japanese history is included, as is Indian, Chinese, and Arab history, intermixed with British politics! Even important modern history is hardly given its fair share, for neither of the World Wars is included!

More than one archaeologist who has read the document believes that it is a deliberate attempt to kill Archaeology, which in some circles is seen as an obstacle to 'development.' Unfortunately, it will also kill the interest in the past which societies like ours have relied upon the schools to foster. It is all most depressing.

CONGRESS OF INDEPENDENT ARCHAEOLOGISTS.

Special Report by the Editor.

This conference, held every two years, took place in York from the 8th to the 10th of September. Your Editor represented the society.

The aim is to bring together all the none-professional archaeologists, especially those in societies such as ours, in order to see how they can be of mutual support to each other. A by-product of this is the re-newing of past acquaintances and the meeting of old friends.

The first event of the Congress was a reception hosted by the *York Archaeological Trust* at which the wonderful Scythian holograms were on show. These were so realistic that it was difficult to realise that the genuine object was not in front of one! The Trust's new finds processing premises in a restored church were most impressive and it was particularly interesting to your Editor to see how each office was linked into the computer network.

The following day, Saturday, after two individual contributions, each region presented a report, the theme being the local groups' relations with the professional archaeological organisations. Your Editor made a small contribution, and chose to speak on the two 1986 digs, namely The Booths site on which we assisted the Unit, and the Box Lane site, on which they assisted us! Other contributors gradually built up a national picture, which on the whole was not as rosy as our local situation. These regional reports extended well into the Sunday morning, one of the last, on the situation in Scotland being chaired by Ed Archer whom some readers will remember as a Junior member of P&DAS in the early sixties. Needless to say, Ed's early training in Pontefract, where we

have always layed much stress on clear presentation and good illustration, ensured an excellent presentation!

The final session, extending either side of Sunday lunch became almost acrimonious as the meeting debated the formation of a formal body, the Council for Independent Archaeology, and following ballot which brought it into existence, many of those present left the room. At the heart of the problem was the role of the CBA, which older amateurs remember was originally set up during or just after the War to co-ordinate the activities of all the archaeological bodies. Apparently nowadays, it is being outfaced by all the demands on it, and in some areas not supporting the amateur groups. Nevertheless, the meeting refused to 'knock' the CBA and the first resolution was to formally affiliate to it.

The Congress was chaired by Andrew Selkirk, Editor of *Current Archaeology*. Evenings were taken up by Dinners, etc., but your Editor was sleeping at home, and missed these. In many respects the Congress was like the CBA (4) Symposia which we attend each year in Leeds, but with the difference that a complete nationwide picture is presented rather than a countywide one. The next one is scheduled for two years hence, and we will certainly advise members in advance so that they can attend. AMATEUR SOCIETIES LIKE OURS HAVE NEEDED SUCH A BODY FOR YEARS. WE MUST NOW SUPPORT IT TO THE BEST OF OUR ABILITY.

Most of the societies attending presented displays of recent work. Your Editor took the Society's box of display material and also put up a Site Photography Exhibition. The exhibition room was an excellent feature of the Congress, and must be continued at future events.

oOo

KENNETH WILSON: PAST PRESIDENT.

Kenneth (Ken) Wilson, Past President of the Pontefract & District Archaeological Society, died in Guernsey General Infirmary on Sunday, May 7th.

Ken was born in Hull, and spent the first half of his working life at sea in the Royal Navy, to which he was briefly recalled for the Korean War. On leaving the service, he qualified as a teacher and became Museum Education Officer for Leeds. In his spare time he became interested in Archaeology, and participated in many important excavations of the fifties and sixties, including Sutton Hoo and Silbury Hill. He was one of the discoverers of the St. Ninian's Isle Treasure.

During this period he became associated with the Pontefract & District Archaeological Society when he dug at the Saint John's Priory site in the town. He and his second wife, Peggy, quickly attracted a small group of keener amateurs around themselves, and it was these people who formed the hard-core of the Society on subsequent digs. They could be seen in the New Inn, on Saturday evenings following society meetings, discussing the lecture, and passing around photographs of sites, etc.

Ken, with Peggy at St. Richard's October, 1963.



Ken directed an excavation at Drax between 1961 and 1964, and directed the excavation of the Dominican Priory of Saint Richard on the site of the Pontefract General Infirmary in 1963. He was Hon. President of the Pontefract & District Archaeological Society in 1963-4. Both Ken and Peggy made many friends locally, and visited the town often until they retired to Alderney in the Channel Isles in 1968.

On the National scene Ken was best known as a War poet, having fourteen of his poems lodged in the Imperial War Museum alongside those of Rupert Brooke and Siegfried Sassoon. He won the Senior Prix d'Honneur for poetry five times at the Guernsey Eisteddfod, and published two books of poems, as well as The Abbeys of Yorkshire, paperback for The Dalesman.

He was buried at sea, on Monday May 15th. One of his poems, chosen for its relevance, is printed elsewhere in this issue.

oOo

MASADA by K. and N. Berry

High above the Dead Sea, Herod the Great built a fortress on the desert cliff as a refuge against his enemies. A snaking path winds up the 900 foot cliff, but we don't have to use it to reach the top - we can ascend to view the excavations of 2000 year old buildings by 20th Century cable car. The cliff top is flat, with steep sides making it impregnable, and one looks out

across the arid wastes of the Judean desert and across the Dead Sea to Jordan.

It was re-discovered in 1802 at the beginning of the 19th Century, and first climbed by Wolcott & Tipping in 1842. A complete encampment has been uncovered; palaces, villas, officer's quarters, store-rooms, baths, and a Synagogue,



HOME AGAIN



by Kenneth Wilson.

No more the waves will thunder on the shore,
The ship strain at her leash like hunting-hound,
No more shall I sail out from Plymouth Sound
Past Cawsand Bay, and noise of creaking oar.
Never again shall east winds cut my face,
Or salty spray cake crust-like on my lips
As sirens scream, and smoke from rolling ships
Floats up towards the sky where storm-clouds
race.
No more the long, slow roll of decks alive
With sea-demons who toss and pitch so gay
And fill the heart with joy in wind and rain,
While on the bridge its busy as a hive
From dawn to dawn throughout the night and day.
My Odyssey is done. I'm home again.

oOo

MASADA CONTINUED

(the oldest found in Israel) all enclosed in a wall tens of miles long with 37 look-out towers; in fact a walled city!

The building material was obtained from a quarry within the walls. Large quantities of food had been stored in case of siege. The atmosphere is so dry that when water was added to bread found by the archaeologists, it was still edible.

The number of baths and pools in such an arid area inevitably poses the question, "Where did the water come from?" On the road to Masada, many dry river beds are passed, and there are flood-notices and measuring rods wherever the road crosses them. With the sun shining down, it is difficult to imagine the waters rushing down the hillsides to the sea, but it does happen. Herod had dams made around Masada and channeled the water into vaulted, roofed cisterns built into the hillside; many gallons of water were collected during the rainy season, but it all had to be carried up the water-path for use within the fortress.

Herod, his successors, and Roman Procurators occupied Masada

until 66AD when a party of Zealots captured it at the beginning of the Jewish War (the Maccabean Rebellion) against the Romans. Nearly one thousand people now occupied the fortress, and the villas and palaces

were sub-divided to provide accommodation. This can be seen by the difference in the thickness of the walls from the original building.

The Zealots held out there for seven years until it became evident that the Romans had breached the wall by building a ramp near the lower terrace. The survivors chose mass suicide rather than slavery. No skeletons have been found but there was evidence of extensive fires in many parts..

Masada was uninhabited until the 4th/5th centuries AD when a few Christian monks adopted a few caves as dwellings, and built cells in or near the ruined buildings. After they left it returned to its uninhabited state.

Many visited Masada during the 19th century, but it wasn't until 1963/5 that serious excavations took place. It is interesting to note that the Sunday Observer, weekly of London contributed to the cost, and thousands of volunteers assisted the large official staff. The project took about a quarter of the estimated time.

Masada is now visited by thousands of tourists each year and is a traditional place of Pilgrimage on Hanuka - the festival of light and heroism.

We are on this Earth for such a short time in relation to over 2000 years that it is difficult to put it into perspective, but to have walked where Herod the Great walked is an awe-inspiring feeling.