

THE MUSEUM, SALTER ROW, PONTEFRACT WF8 1BA. ☎ 702995 (home)

# PONTARCH

Pontefract & District Archaeological Society.

*Editor: Eric Houlder, Past-President.*



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## NEWS OF LOCAL EVENTS

### EDITORIAL.

Our twenty-second issue brings some changes, in the shape of *MicroDesign3*, a new DTP system which the Editor is currently reviewing. Readers should notice an obvious improvement in the clarity and legibility of this newsletter.

We must apologise to members who have submitted material that has not yet appeared in print. In fact the Editor is desperately seeking someone who can type articles onto disc. The editorial PCW is versatile enough to 'read' most types of 3" and 3½" disc, so please see the Editor if you can help. He is the one with a worried look on his face!

### The Confederation of West Riding Local History Societies.

This group of societies is planning a symposium in Pontefract in September 1993 to commemorate the 350th anniversary of the Civil War. The event is still in the planning stage and a venue is being sought. More news later.

### Wood Hall.

The 1992 season at Wood Hall is at last over. After years of sparse results (other than modern) the medieval site is beginning to appear. The removal of the causeway at the entrance to the site produced evidence of a timber bridge, and during the excavation of the area a stone fortified gatehouse foundation appeared.

At the other side of the site at least one timber building is being revealed, whilst Roman pottery and more prehistoric flints are keeping everyone guessing. We eagerly look forward to Simon's report, which should be in our next issue.

### Wakefield Archaeological Society.

The inaugural meeting of this Society was held in Wakefield Museum on October the first. The Society was represented by the Chairman, Bob Evison, and the Past President, Eric Houlder. Also present was member Mr.J Bird.

After a most interesting talk by Mr D Henson, the Committee with the representatives of this Society held a Committee meeting.

The future programme of the society is below. All meetings are in Wakefield Museum at 7-30pm.

October 19th. **The Knights Templar at Temple Newsham.** Dave Wheldrake.

November 17th. **Wood Hall Moated Manor.** Simon Tomson.

December 10th. Social Evening. Details to be announced.

Membership is £4, or £2-50 for OAPs, students, unemployed, and under 16s. Cheques to: The Secretary, W.A.S. 25 Newland Court, Sandal, Wakefield WF1 5AB.

### J.S.Fletcher's Pontefract.

Mr Barrie Chambers of the Mexborough Heritage Society informs me that he has obtained a copy of the original version of this book in good condition. The Editor has his address. He is asking £12 including post and package.

### Local Society Receives £1000.

News has just been received that the Mexborough Heritage Society, Chairman our own David Hedges, has just received a grant of this sum from the local authority.

## A Short History of the Society Part 3: the 1970s and 1980s.

### The third and final part of this series written by the Editor.

Into the early seventies many members of the society continued to dig on important sites around the country. Places like West Stow, Silbury Hill, Mucking, and Sutton Hoo saw P&DAS members digging, camping, and passing comments (not always favourable) on the local brews. By this time, however, the most accomplished of the former juniors had moved away, or started families, so that the seventies was very largely a period of retrenchment and local activity. Too few young people came into the society to make a separate junior group a viable concern.

Though excavation assumed a lower priority in this decade, the society stayed busy in other ways. Much demolition was in progress, and many members were involved in recording buildings, led by the indomitable Don Lodge. Another project which absorbed much time was a very unusual dig. During Victorian times the medieval hermitage beneath the Pontefract General Infirmary had been cleared out and open up to visitors. As the hospital had expanded around it, it had firstly been closed to visitors, and then been used as a tip for rubbish. Old accounts told of a spring of fresh water in the bottom, but nobody could remember this.

In 1971, the society sought and gained permission to clean out this chamber. Work was directed by Doreen Roberts; Don Lodge was in charge of surveying and planning, whilst the writer took the photographs. Accurate plans were made of all the chambers involved, and the work was finally published in the *PONTEFRAC T ARCHAEOLOGICAL JOURNAL*, after another season's work in 1972. (By 1987, the two chambers were again in need of attention, and throughout the Spring and Summer of that year dedicated groups of members led by David Hedges and Bob Evison carried out a thorough cleaning and renovation. Finally, the Hermitage was opened by President Phil. Mayes on July 4th in the presence of Margaret Lodge, widow of Don who had died the previous November, and to whom the restoration was dedicated.)

During this period, the middle seventies, it was discovered that the country's oldest brushmaker was at work in Pontefract. Ever willing to harness the latest technology, Don Lodge and the writer interviewed him using one of the new, portable cassette recorders. Photographs were also taken, and the project was reported on by the Yorkshire Post, as well as by the Pontefract and Castleford Express. In this latter newspaper office, the society had a good friend in John M. Hargraves, who always gave good write ups, and was

instrumental in publicising a number of excavations and other investigations.

Perhaps the most prestigious meeting which has ever been arranged by the society occurred in October 1973. This was at a time when urban redevelopment was making great inroads into our historic towns, and of course Pontefract was at that time notorious for its needless destruction of medieval buildings. The Council for British Archaeology's regional group Four asked the society to arrange a conference on urban archaeology to take place in Pontefract. In some trepidation the committee agreed. Refreshments were provided by Miss Roberts and Mrs Lodge, and amongst the speakers were Harry Battye and the writer. Only the Central Methodist Church was big enough for such a gathering but the church authorities willingly let the society use it. The conference was such a success that at the end, a representative of Pontefract Corporation pledged £2000 towards urban rescue in Yorkshire, £500 more than the city of Hull!

This event marked a turning point in the society's life. It was attended by not a few local politicians, and when they saw the society not only organising such an event, but providing speakers who could hold their own with such as Peter Addeyman, Dr.L.A.S.Butler, and Phil. Mayes, they were quite impressed, and began to regard the P&DAS with much more respect.

Following the conference, emphasis turned towards recording demolition sites. In retrospect, it seems that many other local groups were doing the same, but at the time it was quite depressing for the keen diggers amongst the members. The national trend in excavation was towards big professional units working with large budgets, and the days of the purely amateur digger appeared to be over. It was not realised at that time that there would always be small sites which could not be tackled economically by the big units.

From its inception in 1957, the society had fought for a proper museum for the town. At last, as a result of the redevelopment of the town centre the old library became vacant. Wakefield MDC, the new local authority, responded generously, and after twenty years of effort the town had not only a museum to be proud of, but a real professional Curator, in the shape of Richard Van Riel. For the first time the extensive finds from St. John's Priory could be displayed. One of them even became famous: a male skull exhibiting a horrific sword-wound found its way on to the front cover of Keith Manchester's *THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF DISEASE*. The

old lecture room upstairs was re-furnished and the society is now meeting back in the very room where many of its earliest meetings had been held. The committee, after years of meeting in each others homes on the first Wednesday of each month, could now meet in a more appropriate building.

#### RETURN TO EXCAVATION: THE 1980s.

Field walking in search of pottery etc. had never completely stopped at any time during the society's existence. Newer members like David Hedges and Don Barratt continued in the footsteps of their predecessors, and it was the latter who discovered an important site at Thorpe Audlin. The society was able to organise a limited exploratory dig on this site and found evidence of Romano-British industry, as well as revealing a large area of almost intact Roman Road surface, with actual hoof prints in situ. Work at Thorpe Audlin continued over several seasons, culminating in Bob Evison's remarkable feat of surveying in which he enabled the sectioning of a crop-mark ditch exactly to the centimetre in the centre of a featureless field!

During the 1980s there was an upsurge of interest in excursions. Besides going to the usual places like Hadrian's Wall, the Society became adventurous, and coach parties departed to see Henry VIII's warship, *MARY ROSE*, the city of Norwich, and other distant and exotic locations which inevitably involved overnight stays.

1984 was an important year for Pontefract, marking as it did the five hundredth anniversary of the granting of the town's first Royal Charter by Richard III. To mark this, the society, in conjunction with The Yorkshire Archaeological Society, organised a conference based on the concept, *Pontefract, Key to the North*. It was held in the Community Centre in Carleton, delegates coming from all over Yorkshire. Again, society speakers held their own in erudition and interest with national figures like Professor Beresford. Again the hardest work was done behind the scenes, this time by Chairman Bob Evison, Secretary Pauline Wigglesworth, Treasurer Elizabeth Bullock and Committee members Elizabeth Love, Sandra Peacock, David Hedges, Don Barratt, Don Lodge, Denis Arnold and Bill Booth.

Meanwhile, the West Yorkshire County Archaeology Unit had been busy in the castle. Again, this was something which the society had been pressing for since 1957. As usual in Pontefract, major discoveries were made, and the castle at last appeared to be gaining the fame it deserved.

Then, the WMDC decided to redevelop a part of The

Booths and alter the road alignment in the area. First, they gave the Archaeology Unit an opportunity to dig in the Tanners Row area before re-development. The Unit at first suggested that the society organise the work, but eventually a compromise was reached, whereby the Unit provided direction in the shape of the cheerfully morose Tony Wilmott, and the society provided the labour. Here too some of us met Simon Tomson, later to be appointed site director at Wood Hall, Womersley. This dig was to be another turning point in the society's history. It has since been held up nationally to illustrate how professional and amateur archaeologists can work together in harmony and achieve results equal in quality to fully professional work.

Shortly after the close of Tanners Row, workmen on the road realignment found skeletons in the Booths. The same team which had dug so successfully shortly before was reconstituted, and a major Saxon church and cemetery was dug. This proved to be the most important discovery of all, as C 14 dating gave a preliminary date of 670 AD + or - 90 for one of the burials. So, in 1986, nine hundred years after the Domesday commissioners visited the town, the church which they mentioned was at last revealed. A whole new chapter in the town's history was opened; one which archaeology along was responsible for, and for which the historians could claim no credit.

Perhaps ironically, the last society investigation of its third decade had been predicted in its first *ANNUAL JOURNAL AND REPORT*. Early in November 1986 workers to the north of St. John's Priory site had found skeletons whilst making test borings preparatory to building. The site was reported at the weekend, and so the society had to organise a rescue excavation on a cemetery site with only help from the Archaeology Service, as it had been renamed. It carried out a successful dig in poor conditions, producing a report within two weeks. Nearly thirty years before, Bill Booth and Eric Houlder had been sent to this very same spot by Vince Bellamy to investigate and record a skeleton which had been found by children. Now, both found themselves digging on the same site, one as site director. The wheel had come full circle!

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**This brings the Society History to 1986. The Editor would be delighted if any member could bring it right up-to-date.**

## REVIEWS, COURSES, AND OTHER SOCIETIES' MEETINGS.

### **The Civil War Symposium.**

The morning of September 19th saw frantic activity in the Museum as Pauline, Bob, Peter and Eric tried frantically to provide some sort of blackout for this event. Luckily, the day stayed quite dull, and on the whole those speakers with illustrations were not too badly affected. There was a broad range of topics within the main theme, and both historical and archaeological sources were used by the speakers.

### **Practical Archaeology Weekend at Wood Hall.**

This took place during the weekend 10th to 11th of October. Organised by the *Centre for Continuing Education* of Bradford University, and advertised chiefly around that city, the course was aimed at amateur archaeologists. Over thirty attended on a very cold weekend during which there was, luckily, little rain. Participants learned elements of trowelling, planning, photography, geophysical survey and pottery use in relation to findspot. Unfortunately, all the organisation of the course was done in between issues of *PontArch*, and the Editor regrets being unable to advise members in sufficient time for them to enrol.

### **Forensic Archaeology.**

A Day School on Saturday 28th November in the Chesham Building, Bradford University. This course will explain how criminal and archaeological investigation may overlap.

Leaflets available on the back table for those interested.

### **Other Bradford Courses**

A number of other courses at Bradford may interest members. Again, details are available on the back table after the meeting.

### **Ancient Yorkshire from the Air.**

A Day School organised by the *Aerial Archaeology Committee* of the YAS in Leeds City Art Gallery on November 7th, Admission £1-50. The meeting begins at 10-00 am and continues until 3-30 pm. Derrick Riley informs us that there are many excellent speakers and many new discoveries to be reported. The Art Gallery lecture theatre is one of the best in the North, and has an excellent cafeteria alongside.

### **Mexborough Heritage Society**

#### **Meetings.**

This society meets in the New Mason's Arms, Mexborough on the last Tuesday of every month at 7-15 pm. Visitors are welcome. The following talks may be of interest to our members:

*26th Jan.1993. The South Yorkshire Navigation. Mr M.Taylor.*

*23rd Feb.1993 Rockingham Pottery. The Leader brothers. Bring examples of your own.*

*30th March 1993. The Railways around Mexborough. Peter Ladley.*