

# THE PONTEFRACT AND DISTRICT ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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## EDITORIAL

A number of events in local, national, and world archaeology have occurred since our last issue, and all deserve comment in these pages. Locally, we have been saddened by the death of yet another society stalwart in the person of

### NORMAN BERRY.

The Society sustained a sad loss on the tenth of March 1994 when Norman Berry died. Norman, who had owned a chemists shop in Ferrybridge for many years, and his late wife Kathleen, a District Midwife, were valued members of our Society.

On the eighteenth of March, a presentation of a public address system was made to the Society by their son, David, in remembrance of Norman and Kathleen. This is to be used in the lecture room.

Norman will be greatly missed by all his friends.

Norman Berry. An appreciation of his contribution to the Society is included in this issue.

At the same time, news came in of vandals digging on the site of St John's Priory. What makes this latter intrusion even worse is the fact that the vandals in question were not looking for remains in even the misguided illusioned of some concept of 'digging for history,' but simply to make tracks for unlicensed motor-cycles. What is more, they are probably too young to be punished in any meaningful way even if they are apprehended.

St John's Priory was the site of the first scientific excavation in Pontefract, and the location for the coming together of our founders, back in 1957. Apart from this, the field still contains much potential for excavation, as well as being the final resting place of very many of the medieval inhabitants of the town. It should be inviolable.

Early in March Professor J K S St Joseph died. After O G S Crawford's death in 1957, St Joseph was the leading light in world aerial archaeology, being the only person to hold a Chair in the subject. Your Editor was privileged to have spoken to him, and to have

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Archaeological Society, The Museum, Salter Row, Pontefract, WF8 1BA.  
Editor, Eric Houlder, Past President.

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projected for him on one or two occasions.

The discovery of a Scythian princess, completely preserved in permafrost in the (old) Soviet Union highlights the need for funds to be available for immediate treatment of important discoveries. The Russians have immense problems, but surely UNESCO or even *National Geographic* would put up the funds for something so important?

Finally, the news that Professor Don Brothwell is now a member of the Department of Archaeology at York University brought joy to some of our members. Don Brothwell is probably most famous to the general public for his work on the Lindow Bog Body, but he has also done vital research on the Danish bog bodies, as well as participating in the current work on the Ice Man of the Alps. Those of us who participated in the St John's Priory dig in the early days will remember the well-thumbed copy of his book, *'Digging Up Bones, A Guide to the Excavation and Treatment of Human Skeletal Material'*, which was a feature of the site hut for many years. This copy probably fell apart from constant use! When Professor Brothwell gave a public lecture in York for National Science week, your Editor asked him to autograph the editorial (rather less tatty) copy of the same book. After silently perusing the title page, he finally wrote: 'This is a valuable first edition, worth £100 at least! Treasure it, Don Brothwell.' Any Offers? E.H.

## THE CHANGING FACE OF ARCHAEOLOGY

Since the foundation of the society, in 1957, there have been many changes in archaeology. The 1960s saw increasing specialisation in the discipline with a number of new techniques and approaches being developed. The 1970s saw the establishment of the county units and the 1980s witnessed the rise of developer sponsored rescue excavations and archaeological consultancies.

One by-product of this process is the increasing division between 'professional' and 'amateur'. If you were to consult a dictionary it would probably state that,

the professional is paid to do a job, where as the amateur is not. There is however a dangerous undertone to both terms, the implication being that the professional is of a better quality and higher status. This is by no means true, especially in the world of archaeology. I do not like those terms and prefer to see us all as archaeologists, some of us are employed and others devote their precious 'leisure' time and therefore, in my opinion, the terms should be used are paid and unpaid archaeologists. The so-called 'amateurs' are perfectly capable, and often do, produce work of a much higher quality, than their 'professional' brethren.

There is unfortunately an attitude, prevalent among certain elements within the paid archaeological world, that the discipline is now so specialised that those who do not possess academic qualifications are unfit to contribute. Some go even further and are breathtakingly arrogant, believing with the remarkable self-delusion, that only 'professionals' such as themselves should have a total monopoly on all aspects of archaeology.

This is total folly. Archaeology is part of our heritage, and our heritage belongs to the nation, not any individual or group. The archaeology of an area belongs to its people, it is theirs by right and no pompous, smug, self-righteous 'professional' should be allowed to exclude them. No one knows this area better than the people who have lived here all their lives, and few care as much as they do. The presence of society with its wealth of experience and local knowledge is a major asset to archaeology in this part of Yorkshire. Some members make a major contribution to the Wood Hall Moated Manor Project and it is a pity that some paid archaeologists, who operate locally, do not see fit to involve local volunteers, especially if their wages come from these people in the form of their council taxes.

At his recent lecture to the society Mr Hedges, of the West Yorkshire Archaeology Service, stated that he would welcome volunteers from the society in any future work at the Ferrybridge Henge, this is a positive step forward, hopefully the first of many. There is however no evidence of such a change in attitude

taking place.

Both paid and unpaid archaeologists have major contributions to make. To-day most paid archaeologists are engaged either in rescue excavation or in the monitoring of potential threats to sites. They have very little time for research and this is an area where unpaid archaeologists can contribute greatly, for example the society's work at Swales Yard and Castle Chain.

In the current economic climate both central and local government are cutting back the amount of money they spend on our heritage. To a certain extent this is supported by planning legislation; the main thrust of which, under PPG 16, is that whoever is responsible for the destruction of the site should pay for its excavation. This has led to the rise of independent archaeological contractors who tender to excavate threatened sites, operating in direct competition with the county units.

The future shape of archaeology is somewhat uncertain and it would seem that the days of county units are numbered. The pattern emerging looks like that of North Yorkshire, with those archaeologists employed by councils acting as monitors in planning departments, and field work being undertaken by independent archaeological contractors. The changes in archaeology that have, and will take place, have not been welcomed by all, with some justification. For example the county units have been able to build up a great deal of experience within their areas and much of it will be lost with their demise. It is highly unlikely that these trends will be altered, never mind reversed, and we are going to have to respond to the situation.

What will be the future role of the society in these changing circumstances? Some people would argue that modern archaeology has no place for societies such as Pontefract and should be left to 'professionals'. This is, in my opinion, an extremely short-sighted and narrow view usually held by insecure and inept paid archaeologists and due to the fact that they are afraid that their unpaid 'rivals' may show them up. It would be a major step forward if such individuals concentrated on archaeology and preserving our heritage, rather than playing at politics.

Archaeology is presently faced with a number of threats and limited resources to deal with them. The society is in a position to help protect the local heritage by exerting pressure on local planning authorities to prevent destruction of historic buildings and sites, or carrying out rescue excavations where necessary. Unpaid archaeologists have been responsible for a vast amount of research work over the years. The identification of the vast majority of archaeological sites in the British Isles has been by unpaid archaeologists and this still holds true with a substantial amount of work being undertaken by local societies across the country with either fieldwalking or excavation programmes. Local societies such as Pontefract are the back-bone of British archaeology and it is with them that much of the future lies. The P&DAS should, and hopefully will, continue to contribute a great deal to future archaeology in the region, but the future role of the society will depend on its membership and what they want; in many ways the future is up to you.

The views expressed here are the personal opinions of John McIlwaine and should not be taken as reflecting upon those of any other body or group. The article is dedicated to the members of P&DAS's 2 Para (crack suicide squad) with whom I have had the pleasure of working.

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## PONTEFRACT'S BOXING MP.

Some people lead colourful lives. One such person was John Gully, who was born at Wick in Gloucestershire on 21st August 1783. Apart from his being described as 'big,' I can find no mention of his appearance. Like his father he was a butcher by profession and in 1805 he was imprisoned for debts incurred due to his father's business. Whilst in prison, he was visited by a friend, Henry Pearce, a well-known prize fighter who was nicknamed the Game Chicken. An informal match was arranged between them which took place in the prison with the result that Gully's debts were settled. On his

**LATE NEWS.** News has just reached us of the death of Dr R Bruce-Mitford. Dr Bruce-Mitford was (before his retirement) Keeper of British & Medieval Antiquities at the British Museum and an expert on the Sutton Hoo Ship Burial. Your Editor was privileged to work with him on that site in the late 1960s.

release from gaol, a match with Pearce was held at Hailsham, Sussex, on 8th October 1805. The future King William IV, then Duke of Clarence, was present. After 64 rounds, Gully lost the match, however, his performance was enthusiastically admired. After Pearce retired from the ring due to illness, Gully fought two successful fights with Bob Gregson, who was a giant of a man. The first fight took place near Newmarket on 14th October 1807 when Gully won £200 in 26 rounds. The second fight was staged in Hertfordshire and lasted for one hour fifteen minutes and 28 rounds. Once again the prize money amounted to £200. These victories resulted in Gully becoming the acknowledged champion. He never fought again.

Those were the days of bare-fist boxing when a man could be knocked down time and again, no matter how long he lay on the ground, so long as he could stagger upright to take more punishment. Eventually 'mufflers' were introduced by some organisers of the boxing academies. These were cloths which were wrapped around the hands. It was not until 1869 that the eighth Marquis of Queensberry originated the Queensberry rules which insisted on the use of padded gloves, three-minute rounds, and strict supervision of the type of blows permitted.

Gully then turned his sporting interests towards horse racing. In 1832 both the Derby and the St Leger were won by his horses. In 1844 one of his horses won the Two Thousand Guineas, in 1846 the Derby and the Oaks were won by horses from his stable and in 1854 his horses were winners of the Two Thousand Guineas and the Derby. Gully's horses were trained at Danebury, Hampshire.

In 1832 Gully turned his attention to politics, standing as Liberal Member of Parliament for Pontefract. Pontefract then returned two members to Parliament, John Gully and the Honourable H V S Jerningham. In 1835 Gully was again returned and retained his seat until 1837. He tried again in 1841 but lost to Viscount Pollington and Richard Monckton Milnes (later Lord Houghton of Fryston Hall, and one-time fiancé of Florence Nightingale).

His next successful venture took place in 1862 when

he purchased the Wingate estate in County Durham, plus the coal mines which were included in the estate. During his varied career he found time to marry twice and to father twenty four children. Twelve per wife.

John Gully had literally fought his way out of a debtors prison and made his way to the top. He died a wealthy man.

## THE PRIZE RING

As its name implies, the Prize Ring was the arena in which fights took place, the victor gaining a purse of money plus the satisfaction of being acclaimed 'the winner.' Although competition fighting is recorded in various countries from an early date, for instance Ancient Greece and later in the circuses of Rome, (where the *cestus*, a type of knuckle-duster was employed, fights often ending in death), the sport only really became popular in Britain.

Boxers often travelled from village to village, wherever a fair was taking place, challenging all-comers to a bout in the ring. When boxing booths were incorporated into travelling fairs, complete with their own men, the peripatetic pugilists vanished from the scene.

In *The Protestant Mercury* of 1681 there is account of a bare-knuckle fight between a butcher and a footman. This is the earliest known record of a boxing match in Britain.

Rough and unsavoury as it often was, the sport attracted huge crowds. Thieves and swindlers thronged to such meetings, as did the aristocracy. At one time it was illegal even to watch such a bout, and in fact to this day in Great Britain boxing has never been legalised.

Barbara Stewart.

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