

THE PONTEFRACT AND DISTRICT ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

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SPECIAL FORTIETH BIRTHDAY ISSUE!

EDITORIAL

This is a momentous time for the Society, and with the exception of this editorial the whole issue of the newsletter is taken up with looking back on the achievements of the last forty years.

Sadly, we have lost Barbara Lowe, a valued Committee Member and the Finds Officer at Wood Hall. A proper appreciation will appear in our next issue.

The news about New Hall is encouraging. Following the West Yorkshire Unit's work on the site, it was expected that the foundations would be destroyed to allow building to commence. Readers may have read in *The Pontefract and Castleford Express* that the plans have been altered so that the ruins will be preserved beneath the houses. This result was entirely due to the efforts of our Chairman, Bob Evison who was able to harness support from the highest level to save a unique portion

of heritage.

By the time this appears, members may have seen Field Director Eric Houlder (also Editor) on Yorkshire Television, though the altered programming schedules caused by the recent General Election may have held him back! The programme in question is *Tonight* at 6-30 on Channel Three. In April Eric assisted in a programme on the history of lavatories (does this surprise you?). There will be three films in the series, which also includes the Society's friend Andrew (Bone) Jones of the ARC in York. Ian Clayton of Featherstone heads the series looking at Yorkshire privies through the ages.

Local examples will include a superb late Victorian design from Featherstone, and the garderobe at the foot of the keep in the castle, reputedly used by Henry VIII and other royal personalities.

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

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THE SOCIETY HISTORY

This series of articles originally appeared in PONTARC in 1992. Here it is repeated, and updated to tell the full story.

EARLY DAYS.

The Society was founded in 1957. For those members (perhaps now in the majority) who do not remember that era, a few words of explanation are necessary. The mid to late 1950s had seen a massive increase in interest in archaeology. This was almost entirely due to the efforts of three people, Paul Johnstone, Sir Mortimer Wheeler, and Professor Glyn Daniel. Johnstone was a producer with BBC Television, and had been given the task of bringing to the small screen a newly conceived panel game called ANIMAL, VEGETABLE, MINERAL? in which museums in different parts of Britain challenged the panel to identify objects. Sir Mortimer Wheeler and Glyn Daniel were two of the regular team members. To the surprise of both, the game was an instant success and they became household names. Johnstone followed this up with a series called BURIED TREASURE which used the new medium to examine various aspects of archaeology. (Several members were privileged to meet Paul Johnstone and Glyn Daniel on various digs in the sixties, and one actually served on a committee with Sir Mortimer Wheeler during the seventies)

Thus by 1957 there was an increasing interest in the subject, which was reflected in the blossoming of night school classes. Pontefract was just one amongst many small towns in which enthusiasts were getting together to do something themselves instead of just viewing the subject on TV.

The prime movers in our town were Messrs.A.S.(Alf) Ward, and K.(Ken) Gardiner. Mr. Ward was a member of the Worker's Educational Association, the WEA, and he arranged for the Association, in conjunction with the Department of Extramural Studies of Leeds University, to run a series of classes in basic archaeology. The WEA sent as Tutor, C.V.(Vince) Bellamy.

Vince Bellamy was a happy choice, as beneath a rather stern exterior he was a kindly and patient instructor. Some time after the classes began he confided to several of the students that he too was learning archaeology, and was keeping just in front of

them! Nevertheless, he and the colleagues whom he brought from Leeds insisted that everything should be done correctly.

It soon became clear that theoretical instruction was not enough, and Mr. Bellamy began to look around for a site on which to run a trial excavation; a short-term training dig which was destined, eventually, to become the second-longest continuous excavation in the British Isles, outlasted only by Wharram Percy! Thus it was that a party of very amateur archaeologists began to look around the Grange Field, and came to the attention of a group of schoolboys who were flying model aircraft. One of those boys was, in fact, the present writer.

When digging began on the Grange, many local people asked if they could join in. Amongst them were Kevin Stubbs, Terence Carney, Donald C. Lodge, David Ashton, David Hookham, Tom Peacock, David Brookes, Chris. Wells, Eric Houlder, and Madge Horner. Seeing the activity on the field, the then Vicar of All Saints, the Rev. Haigh, came across and asked some of the 'archaeologists' if they would have a look at the foundations of the church. It was during this work that four of the original class members, Alf Ward, Ken Gardiner, Bill Booth, and Mollie Millward, sitting together on a tomb-chest, determined to form an archaeological society in the town.

They called a public meeting in the Parish Hall of All Saints Church. The response was good so the Society was formed, with Ken Gardiner as its first Secretary. Ken proved to be a good choice, having lots of energy which was needed during these early days. He remained the Secretary until the present writer took over in 1964. Ken left his mark upon the Society in many ways, not the least in being the originator of the society's reputation for activity. The first Treasurer was Frances Ridsdale, and after she married and moved away the office was taken by Dorothy Arundel. Both these efficient ladies ensured that the society's finances were kept on a secure footing in the early, struggling, days.

Until this time, all archaeology in Pontefract had been under the wing of Vince Bellamy and the WEA. Now things were to change. Construction of a new bus station in THE TRINITIES, between Horsefair and Northgate, unearthed human remains, and the new society was called in. A hurried rescue dig was mounted, and the members discovered that digging was only one aspect of archaeology. Few photographs were taken, though several in both monochrome and colour by John Holmes are still extant, and no plans were made; instead, finds were marked on a large site-plan supplied by the Borough Engineer. Indeed, by present standards the dig was a fiasco. However, it must be judged by the standards of the day, when only London had any semblance of a rescue team, and by those standards, the society had not done badly for its first attempt. One very interesting find on this site was a skeleton which still had its hair preserved. Again, younger members will find this difficult to believe, but there was no conservation service locally accessible, and the society Secretary had to set about the treatment of the hair himself.

The demolition of a beautiful old house in Horsefair, Micklegate House, showed up another problem which the society had to face. Inside the building were mouldings and panelling which needed recording, and in desperation the Committee called in a professional photographer. The next important local building to be threatened received rather better treatment. An old house at the bottom of Baghill Lane turned out to have some important details, and these were recorded by several members who in the interval had taught themselves some rudiments of photography and recording.

Some time after this, the society was asked to investigate some moulded stonework which had been discovered at the top of Mill Lane, Nevison. What had been revealed was, in fact, the remains of the Chantry Chapel of St. Thomas, built in memory of Thomas, Earl of Lancaster on the spot where he had been executed. Again no plans were made and few photographs were taken; the only vestige of the site now are some of the

moulded stones.

So, by the beginning of 1959 it was becoming evident that if the society was to function efficiently it must have its own experts in photography, planning and draughtsmanship, and the logistics of excavation. The problem was partially solved from a new and surprising direction. So many young people had joined by this time that there was a demand for a junior section, and the secretary took it upon himself to organise one. Meetings were first held in a local school, and then in his own home. Outside speakers were called upon in areas where Ken himself did not feel confident, and it was in this capacity that the present writer gave his first talk on site photography whilst on vacation from College. More than a few of our juniors have gone on to distinguish themselves in various archaeological fields since then, and the pages of learned journals still at times carry their names.

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GROWING CONFIDENCE: THE 1960s

It was the juniors who on the whole provided the experts after 1960, assisted by two people whose first contact with the society was on the site of St. John's Priory, the Grange. Ken Wilson was at that time the Education Officer at the Abbey House Museum at Kirkstall in Leeds. Each summer he had worked on various sites around the country, and had become something of an expert. Peggy White, who was to become his wife was a professional who had learned her archaeology from Wheeler himself. During the early 1960s, the Wilsons organised small-scale digs on a number of sites and selected members of the Pontefract Society, especially the promising juniors, were invited to participate. Though the St. John's site was well run in these early days, the Wilsons' digs were done very strictly by the book, and there was never a blade of grass out of place. The rigorous site discipline learned in this way was to stand everyone in good stead, and earned praise from more than one eminent archaeologist during the next twenty years.

Alongside the excavation, the society always ran a winter programme of lectures, which in the early years

was organised by Bill Booth. This was supplemented by visits to places like Skipton Castle, and days spent digging on the Kirkstall Abbey site. Some time during 1960, the writer returned from College and met another person who was to have a lasting effect on the society. Fred Morris was a lorry driver who had always been interested in archaeology. Having taken part in an excavation of one of the burial mounds on the battlefield of Towton during the early thirties, he had stayed interested, and now took the juniors under his wing. Many walks were organised, taking in churches, castles, battlefields, and interesting houses. Fred maintained his interest in excavation too, and had a fund of anecdotes which he could produce with a straight face in the pub after a hard day on the site.

Fred had taken part in the 'excavation' into the Towton field burial mounds in the 1920s or 1930s, and occasionally spoke about this. To the end of his excavational experience (early 1970s) he maintained his drole sense of humour, and often had his knowledgeable friends paralysed with silent laughter, whilst some eager young excavator instructed him in the finer points of digging!

To return to Pontefract, one of the society's biggest worries at this time was the castle. Since the Victorian clearance of the 1880s, nothing had been done other than the application of a little cement in places where the stonework was cracking. Consequently, the ruins were in a dreadful state. The museum too, had had nothing done since Victorian times. The displays were mixed up, labels had been juxtaposed, and some items were 'missing.' By a process of pestering, the society gained permission to carry out basic restoration work in castle and museum. Ken Gardiner worked with a professional restorer of stonework and learned enough to carry out restoration himself. During this, he discovered a small oven in the kitchens which had been entirely lost as a result of gardening activities over the years. Fred Morris began to cut a terrace into the banking which surrounded the castle on the Northgate side, and discovered that the banking was entirely artificial, again a product of Victorian and later

gardeners tipping their rubbish over the edge. In the museum, John Holmes, Ken Evans and Mr. Add constructed new showcases with modern lighting, whilst other members cleaned and re-labelled the exhibits.

From its inception, the society provided guides to conduct visitors around the castle. There were few weekends in the year when P&DAS members were not on duty in the Castle Museum. Several of them supplemented the guided tours with illustrated talks to interested groups all over the county. In the early years the talks were given mainly by Ken Gardiner, but later, Don Lodge and Bill Booth became quite well known as a sort of double act.

There was a strong strain of showmanship evident in the committee during these early days. Ken Gardiner, the Secretary, spent 24 hours as a prisoner in the dungeon of the castle as an experiment during 1958 and on several occasions permission was obtained to open the dungeons to the public. On one of these, in October 1959, three members dressed in costume to show people around. Such stunts certainly gained publicity for the society, but in retrospect they did little real good and much harm. As the years passed members began to realise that to gain respect, a learned society must ACT in a learned manner.

The years from 1961 to 1963 were ones of retrenchment. Members carried on working in the castle, digging at St. John's, going on coach excursions and walking with Fred Morris. An important addition to the committee during these years was Doreen Roberts, an experienced excavator who dug every year in the North. Miss Roberts' experience of archaeology and committee procedure were to stand the society in good stead. Later, her home in Friarwood house became for many years the repository of the society's library, and her outbuildings were used to store various antiquities.

In 1963 plans were announced to extend Pontefract General Infirmary to the south, on to land which had been an orchard since the seventeenth century. The society asked for, and obtained permission, to carry out

a dig to investigate the remains of the Dominican Friary of St. Richard, which had once stood here. Work was directed by Ken Wilson. St. Richards was to be the first proper dig done by the society, a report being published promptly in the ANNUAL JOURNAL AND REPORT. One of the personalities who came to dig was John Ingles, a figure who was already a legend in British Archaeology. (He had already spent at least one season digging at St John's Priory in the 1950s) The writer is proud of the fact that Mr. Ingles took him under his wing, and showed him how to properly prepare a feature for photography.

This was a busy time for many members. Ken and Peggy Wilson were also involved in a long-term investigation at Drax where a medieval moated site, Scurff Hall, and a small Romano-British farmstead were being dug. Here, members met diggers from all over Britain, and in the case of the legendary Ilsa, Europe. Looking back, this period was a crucial one for the society. By meeting other diggers, and digging under different directors, on sites of different periods demanding different techniques, members were becoming less parochial in their outlook, and some were becoming good archaeologists. The convivial evenings spent in hostels near the sites enabled people to learn more, and gave them a longing to sample archaeology outside the confines of the society.

Mention has already been made of the ANNUAL JOURNAL AND REPORT. This was preceded by several newsletters which were largely produced by John Holmes who submitted no bill! The first JOURNAL appeared in 1961 and contained reports on the various sites investigated by members. One of its most valuable reports was one on the early history of the society which the present writer has found invaluable. Though the article does not carry a credit line, it was probably written by David Hookham, another of the early members who did valuable service before leaving. Realising the importance of regular publication, the society eventually elected the writer as Publications Secretary in 1963 and he carried out this duty until he became Secretary in the mid-60s. Terry

Carney, a most able young man, took over publications until he went to University. Unfortunately, the increasing cost of printing meant that after 1968 the PONTEFRACT ARCHAEOLOGICAL JOURNAL, as it was renamed in 1966, became an intermittent rather than an annual publication. However, the society has never lost sight of the importance of prompt publication of its work, and today reports are issued as monographs in whatever form is affordable at the time.

In many ways the mid to late 1960s were good years for the society. After several years of change on the committee, a group became established which contained experts in various aspects of archaeology and local history. Members were invited to participate in quite prestigious digs, several of them in a supervisory capacity. The hard core of the previous class of juniors was now adult, but still largely living locally and with enough free time to commit themselves to working for the society. Work in the castle and in the museum had finished in 1965, leaving the active members time to branch out. Each summer, members spent digging on sites as far removed as the Scilly Isles (where one prominent member, Ken Wilson, one day received by accident a box of groceries intended for another Mr. Wilson also on the Scillies at the same time: Harold Wilson!) and Hadrian's Wall. The training given by the Wilsons was sufficient to gain invitations from eminent archaeologists to several members. Some of them having to actually turn down requests from people like Richard Atkinson, because of previous commitments.

The big archaeological news story of 1968-9 was the massive programme of excavations planned for Silbury Hill, which was to be financed by the BBC. The writer well remembers the dilemma, and the disappointment involved in having to turn down a chance to dig on this site, as he had already promised himself to another, even better known site. One member did in fact dig at Silbury; Philip Brunt brought back glowing reports of the BBC camp catering. These were the days of CHRONICLE, a prestigious archaeological TV programme on BBC 2. Several members did, in fact appear on this, but their pride was somewhat dimmed

by the fact that few people in Pontefract could actually receive BBC 2!

Nearer home, there were several occasions when the society had to arrange small excavations to solve problems, including an interesting one on a moated site at Glasshoughton, and the sectioning of a Roman road at Ilkley. Members did a lot of field-walking, and on one of these expeditions, Charles Baines discovered a Roman Villa at Wentbridge.

Demolitions in the town revealed a beautiful medieval timber-framed house in the market place, thinly disguised as Bratley's Chemists shop. A team from the society recorded the shop, and managed to recover a Jacobean plaster chimney-piece which was carefully restored by another locally prominent member, Harry Battye.

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DECADE OF RETRENCHMENT: THE 1970s.

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 PONTFRAC 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 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. One or two amateurs at this time decided to specialise in just one aspect of archaeology, hoping that by doing this they could become better than the professionals.

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 refurbished 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 still continues, in search of enigmatic features first seen on aerial photographs.

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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THE FOURTH DECADE

It is said that life begins at forty, and those of us who have passed that milestone will certainly confirm the truth of that statement. Whether this applies to learned societies is quite another matter, and so, as the P&DAS reaches the end of the fourth decade of its history it is for others to judge.

On looking back there does not seem to be anything new in the Society's activities since 1987. We have dug, recorded buildings, visited historic places, and attended meetings. Yet in that same decade other societies have collapsed, shrunk, or become moribund. Why has the P&DAS flourished, for flourished it has, with membership constantly well over the hundred and now a thriving branch of the Young Archaeologists' Club under its aegis? Again, only outsiders can judge.

A new group of personalities has animated the Society in the last two decades, and these, together with the shrinking band of original members carry the flag forward. Foremost must be named Chairman Bob Evison, whose sheer energy has influenced agencies from English Heritage to Wakefield MD Council in the Society's favour. Pauline Wigglesworth, indefatigable Secretary and organiser of excursions and trips to near and far; the far including Egypt and China! Peter Lockett has ably managed the finances, whilst Jennie Barker has quietly but efficiently nursed the Young Archaeologists into being. Then there is the McNaught family, three generations, the two youngest members being professional and student archaeologist. Many others too numerous to name have contributed also, and our thanks go to them all.

Society work during the fourth decade may be conveniently divided into Survey and excavation, though some sites required both. Most important was undoubtedly Swales Yard. This derelict timber-framed terrace was surveyed with some excavation, and the results published in a major book. The restoration work with the report won The Ironbridge Award for

1994. David Heslop, who directed the work for the Society is now County Archaeologist for Tyne and Wear. A smaller survey and excavation took place in the cellars of Castle Chain, a building owned and lived in by Committee Member Elizabeth Love. The cellar proved to be part of the gate-passage of the western entrance to the Castle. Work here was directed by Simon Tomson of the Wood Hall Moated Manor Project, who also led us in a fruitless search for Roman Road 28b at North Featherstone.

Another professional friend of the Society, John McIlwaine now of Bradford University, directed a seasons work for us on an apparent henge at Badsworth. The word 'apparent' is used, as though the earthwork, first discovered by Committee Member Eric Houlder whilst flying with the late Derrick Riley, has every appearance of a class II henge, Romano-British as well as Neolithic artefacts were found.

A small excavation in advance of concreting was carried out behind property in Northgate, and directed by Michael Holdsworth. This has not been published yet, and the Society awaits the final report.

THE FUTURE

No group can stand still, and the P&DAS has many exciting activities planned for the coming months and years. These include more excursions to exotic places, more excavation, and more survey.

The Society is fully aware that it depends completely upon its members. Some dig and do not go on excursions. Others travel all over, but do not become involved in practical work. All contribute in their own ways to the success story that is The Pontefract and District Archaeological Society.

FROM SMALL BEGINNINGS

by Eric Houlder.

This article first appeared in BRITISH ARCHAEOLOGY magazine in early 1988.

One day in the early summer of 1956 a small group of teenage boys was flying a model glider in a field in Pontefract. The field itself was interesting, being the site of a Cluniac Priory which had been dissolved by Henry VIII over four centuries before, but only one of

the boys actually knew this.

The immediate problem was a gusty wind which made conditions difficult. As the eldest of the group rushed over a small hillock, towline in hand, he nearly charged into a number of people who were gathered around some sort of machine from which wires spread to metal pegs placed in the ground. The sudden halt caused the glider to leave the towline and swing downwind, followed on the ground by the rest of the boys. Meanwhile, the boy with the towline, after carefully winding the latter in, approached the group around the machine.

He soon discovered that they were the members and the tutor of a WEA Extramural class in Archaeology, and were planning to begin a short training dig the following Spring thanks to the efforts of TV programmes like *Animal, Vegetable, Mineral?* and *Buried Treasure*, most people had some knowledge of what archaeologists did. Personalities like Sir Mortimer Wheeler and Glyn Daniel were familiar to the viewing public, who not having a choice of channels to

Younger readers may not realise, but at the time we are talking of, archaeology in Britain was almost entirely staffed by amateurs. Excavations were often directed by university or WEA tutors in their holidays, or perhaps by museum professionals, but nearly all the rest did something else for a living. There was a definite structure all the same. You spent several seasons as a volunteer on various digs in different parts of the country, and if you were good enough, a director would ask you to become one of his supervisors. Several more seasons in this capacity and you were considered qualified to direct small excavations. 'Experts,' like photographers or draughtsmen, were in great demand, and sometimes spent many seasons on the same site. Most digging took place during the university/school holidays, or at weekends, with the post-excavation work done in the evenings.

Unfortunately, there was no real infrastructure to the system, and it collapsed in the 1970s with the increasing demands forced upon it by the need to

rescue information from town centre re-development schemes which could not wait until the summer holidays!

During the P&DAS's early years, most members got their excavational experience on the original priory site in the town, and it was here that many of us met people who were to exert lasting influence over us. The site was advertised in the CBA Calendar of Excavations, so that it attracted the itinerant diggers who were the backbone of British archaeology.

One day in 1959 or 1960 I was put to work cleaning a stone structure alongside an elderly Scotsman, by the name of Mr. Inglis. By then I considered myself to be quite good, so it was instructive, and almost humbling, to see a real expert at work. John Inglis was a retired schoolmaster who lived in a remote cottage in the Highlands. He apparently spent most of the winter planning his forays into the field. He had no car, and travelled everywhere by train; indeed, if anyone was rash enough to venture a question about train times, he could usually produce a timetable on the spot! I met him several years later on another site, and again learned much from him. The whole world of archaeology was saddened when he died about ten years later.

John Inglis was not the only itinerant digger who worked alongside the P&DAS members, so it was not long before the younger and more active members began to branch out, so to speak. At the same time, experienced people joined the society, so that by 1963 it could organise and direct its first dig, on the site of a Dominican Priory in the town threatened by development.

These developments were important, for a local group which remains parochial is doomed. It is vital to have members who have worked on sites of most periods; who are skilled in drawing, photography, and interpretation; who can organise the logistics of a dig. It is useful, too, to have members who own vans, trucks, even JCBs.

So by the middle sixties P&DAS members could be found digging on sites in different parts of the country.

With excavation being then a mainly summer occupation, we returned home with enviable tans, and (being on the whole keen photographers) collections of slides which became the basis of society Members' Evenings for the winter months. As experience built up, it was not long before individuals were asked to become supervisors, whilst others directed small digs for local and county societies. It was about this time that the Roman Antiquities Section of the Yorkshire Archaeological Society asked me to direct a small dig at Ilkley, with the intention of sectioning a Roman road near the River Wharfe. One incident on this site seems now to be almost prophetic!

Digging through accumulated garden soil, one of the volunteers, Fred Morris, found a recent ship-halfpenny. He announced the discovery by calling out that he had found a ship-burial!

The following spring, 1967, several members received letters asking for their services in the new work at Sutton Hoo. The famous ship-burial had been excavated in the final weeks of peace in 1939, and the intention had always been to return and finish the dig by examining the mound which overlay the ship, and by carefully re-excavating the spoil-heaps. Now half a dozen members of this small Yorkshire society had been asked to take part in an archaeological project of the greatest importance.

The Sutton Hoo dig was not the only site of importance being dug at this time, the late sixties. Several members took part in the Silbury Hill dig, whilst others worked at Mucking, and at West Stowe, as well as at many other less famous, but none the less important sites. Looking back from our vantage-point of the late eighties, the big rural sites of the late sixties/early seventies were the apogee of the old amateur-based system. The diggers lived in tented 'townships' in corners of fields, woodland glades, and on one occasion, a medieval walled garden! Being thrust into each others' pockets generated a lot of good will, and there were many convivial evenings spent in country pubs, or even around camp fires. Even today, a whiff of Elsanol brings it all back, and a request from

some society for me to go and show my slides is met with pleasure for the opportunity to re-live it all.

By the middle 1970s the character of the P&DAS was changing; some members moved from the district whilst others married and started families, so that for several years only local sites were dug. A change in the character of archaeology itself was coming about too, as well as a massive re-development of the historic town centre. Thus it came about, that for several years the emphasis was placed upon recording standing buildings before and during demolition. Vince Bellamy was still digging on St.John's Priory site, supported by a few loyal members, but this was about the extent of our archaeology. When he died, the members found themselves without a site to dig. The formation of a County Unit at about the same time led many to believe that there was no longer a role left for the amateur.

Thus, by the eighties, the P&DAS had become a group which met regularly for lectures, which still acted as a pressure group for conservation, which recorded the vanishing buildings in the town, but which did little else.

This stagnant phase came to an end in 1981 when one of the keener members, Don Barratt, found what appeared to be a scattered hoard of late Roman coins in a field alongside Roman road 28b just south of Pontefract. The time was opportune, for my children were now in primary school, and I felt that both the society and myself needed an injection of real archaeology. Don was a member both of the P&DAS and of the nearby Darrington society, and so once permission had been given by the farmer, a joint society project was mounted.

The aim was to find the actual Roman road, section it, and elucidate the nature of the settlement from which the hoard had come.

Of the volunteers who turned up, very few had experience of actual excavation, so both myself and the Assistant Director, David Hedges, spent a lot of our time instructing. Luckily our initial probing had located the actual road surface, so that by the end of the first weekend, which had been spent in continuous sunshine,

we were able to see and record the upper, eroded surface, and one of the side-ditches. Thus encouraged, most of the diggers turned up the following weekend during which we sectioned the road, and gave lessons in section drawing and photography.

In fact the glorious weather of that September brought out so many people that we opened another area in a different part of the field, and were elated when the novice diggers, stiffened with a few experienced people, found actual hoof-prints, and a Romano-British ore roasting hearth.

During the next Autumn, a further programme of excavation was mounted. This time David and I decided that having sectioned the road, it was now time to expose a large area of surface for record in minute detail. Again we were lucky with the weather, at least to begin with, and with help from two professionals who gave their time and skill to us.

Several more seasons were spent at Thorpe Audlin, the last one being reported on in *British Archaeology* No.6. Meanwhile, more excavation work has come our way. The society assisted the West Yorkshire County Archaeology Service in the discovery of a Saxon chapel and burial ground in the heart of old Pontefract.

Following on from this, we were able to mount an instant rescue dig on a medieval burial ground threatened by building work also inside the town. As the threat materialised at the weekend, the digging team had to fall back on its own resources, though individual members of the County Service provided help and equipment. This was the first site on which the society made use of a computer, though only for its word-processing capabilities. Ironically, the site had been partially investigated by myself and another of our surviving members back in 1958! It could be said that the wheel had come full circle.

Now, at the beginning of the P&DAS's fourth decade, the society is more active than ever. There is always field-walking going on, excursions are arranged, and there is a growing number of members who work on excavations other than local ones. A beginning has

been in the computerisation of excavation records, whilst excavation reports and society newsletters are now produced using a Desktop Publishing software package.

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PAST AND FUTURE SOCIETY AIMS

On page four of our very first *Annual Journal and Report*, an anonymous writer (probably David Hookham; a stalwart of the early years) listed the infant society's aims as follows:

The recording of old buildings before and during demolition.

A collection of photographs and slides (sic) of local subjects.

Mapping the Roman roads and recording Roman finds in the district.

Publication of a modern guide book to the castle.

Development of the guide service not only to the castle but to other places of interest also.

The collection and record of ancient documents and deeds.

Improvements in the (Castle) museum.

The study of local industry and its history.

The publication of information obtained from our excavations and researches for use by schools and other interested bodies.

After forty years, it may be instructive to re-examine these and determine exactly how many of them have been realised.

In the recording of old buildings we can claim an unblemished record. From Kevin Stubbs' almost single-handed feat on the seventeenth century house at the bottom of Baghill Lane in 1960, to the team effort that helped to gain the recent award, by way of Harry Battye's and the Editor's efforts on the site of Bratley's shop in 1967, the Society has put in sterling work.

The collection of photographs has gone on apace too, though now that the town has a proper museum our pictures and other records are stored there.

Mapping of Roman roads has proceeded throughout the last forty years. The Society mounted a dig for the Yorkshire Archaeological Society at Ilkley in the mid 1960s, whilst much of the work at Thorpe Audlin was on the Roman road 28b. More recently, Simon Tomson directed a short dig in search of 28b at North Featherstone. Our card-index SMR was the first in the locality and holds details of many Roman (and other) finds.

We never did publish a modern guide book to the castle. The

old Borough Council did, but as this was a re-hash of Victorian historical writing, we did not really approve. Finally, following the County Unit's excavations in the castle, a modern, readable and stimulating guide appeared from the Authority.

Our guide service has expanded its role as suggested in the first *Journal*. Not only do we supply castle guides, but also guides to the Hermitage, as well as the town in general! Unfortunately there is no proper qualification for guiding, and recently non-society guides have offered their services to the public. A useful Society role for the future would be to demand a basic minimum of knowledge and presentation skills before accreditation.

We have no collection or record of ancient documents and deeds. This is properly a task for the County Record Office who provide a most efficient service to the researcher.

Improvements were carried out in the Castle Museum. However, since the establishment of the Town Museum, the Castle museum has become a visitor centre.

Some work has been done on local industry and its history, but only on a piecemeal basis. This could perhaps be developed in the next forty years.

The Society has always published its research, as described in the historical articles above. In addition, verbal reports are always presented to the public and to the archaeological agencies such as *The Council for British Archaeology; Yorkshire and Humberside*, the old Group 4.

On consideration it may be seen that some few of these aims are historical rather than archaeological, and thus the province of other groups than ours. Others have been realised with the rise of professional bodies and museums. Yet others do require attention and the application of rigorous standards, such as the guiding service. However, the Society does have cause to congratulate itself on the past four decades. Let us hope that the next forty years are as fruitful, as interesting, and as exciting.