

THE PONTEFRACT AND DISTRICT ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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THE SAINT AIDAN'S PROJECT

by our Field Director.

When the River Aire burst into the giant opencast site several years ago, it filled the newspapers and dominated the other media. In fact the flow was so strong that the current of the lower Aire was temporarily reversed, whilst the complete flow of the Calder, which joins the Aire at Castleford, swung right around into the upper Aire.

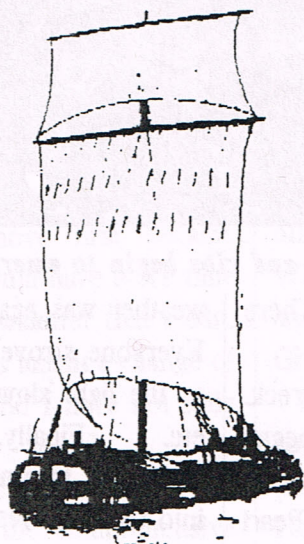
It quickly became apparent that the breach could not be repaired, so the owner, R J Budge, diverted the river leaving a complete stretch to gradually dry up. This stretch of river was one that had been navigable for perhaps three centuries, and contained staites from early coal-mining sites. As it dried, the upper parts of several sunken vessels began to show through the shrinking mud.

This Society's involvement

began when your Editor, who is also Field Director, received a 'phone call from John McIlwaine of the Dept. of Archaeological Science, Bradford University. Briefly John - a good friend of the Society - was putting together a research and recording team consisting largely of members of the Nautical Archaeology Society. Would this Society like to be involved? Would I be able to be

present at a site visit? Needless to say, the answers were in the affirmative. Together with other interested parties, including John Buglass who spoke to us in October, I spent an afternoon in early November being bumped around in a landrover.

The site is huge. The machines are bigger than the estate I live on! Our guide, from Millers the



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Editor, Eric Houlder, Past President.

contractors, showed us the dried up river with an early iron bridge, an early lock now high and dry, and the boats. Some looked like piles of coal. Others had woodwork showing.

As the light deteriorated we approached the last wreck. John B slithered down the bank and investigated. He found a mast-step; wooden planks stood out of the ground. Right above him were the twisted sheets of iron that the river had poured through on that fatal night. Through the breach could be seen the opencast working. We were informed that that particular stretch of river would be 'drag-lined' before Christmas.

Back in the site office a hasty conference was held. Everyone capable of supervising such an operation had other commitments. However, we decided to meet on site on Sunday 23rd November.

The day dawned cold and foggy. Everyone had brought along hand-tools (except the writer, who had three bags of cameras and lenses, a large tripod, scales, a golf umbrella, and other gear). It quickly became evident that here was a wooden vessel, almost certainly a Humber Keel. Very few of these were made of wood after the mid 19th century, so we probably had an early one. Its remains were easily cleared, though the massive flow into the breach had forced débris around and under it.



The keelson and ribs begin to emerge. The breach is visible top left. S.T.

Much of this was modern rubbish in plastic bags. There were eighteenth century clogs and pottery too.

A few hours served to clear almost all the wreck. Photographs were taken, and John McIlwaine began surveying it. It was decided to 'blitz' it with volunteers two weeks later, on Sunday 7th December, Pearl Harbour Day! One good day with as many as possible brushing and planning should see the job completed. The other wrecks could then be tackled at leisure as there is no immediate threat to them.

Volunteers were asked for at the Society meeting immediately preceding the seventh. As Field Director, I co-ordinated our effort, and ensured that all volunteers

were experienced and had the correct equipment. Several days before, I had to telephone actual numbers to our site director, Steve Webster of the NAS, so that places could be reserved in the landrovers.

The actual morning dawned, and we met in the site car park, unfortunately without landrovers. Obviously a hitch, but not at our end. An hour later we were being bumped around even more, as lugging equipment we were transported to the site. Someone observed that at Alton Towers, people actually pay for less scary and much safer rides!

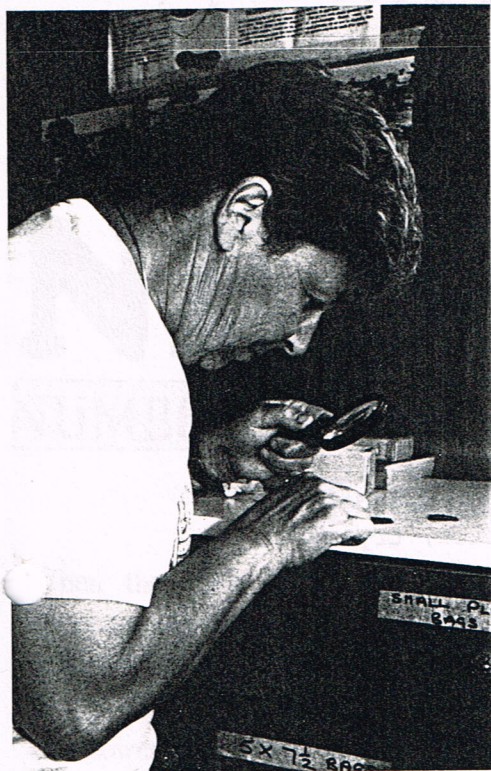
A quick clean, a set of photographs in less than perfect conditions, and the planning began. Luckily the

weather was again helpful, as there was no rain or fog. Everyone strove personfully to get the planning finished as the light slowly died, only breaking off to eat, drink, etc. Finally, we struggled back up the sloping riverbank lugging equipment, and cramming everything into two vehicles (it had taken three to bring us!) started back in semi-darkness. There were one or two hairy moments as the track passed close to the new watercourse, but by about 4-00pm we were on our way home.

The final plans are well on their way to completion at the time of writing. Steve informs me that everyone's work is slotting together nicely.

E.H.

BARBARA LOWE.



Barbara Lowe P.I.F.A. died in February 1997 at Cookridge Hospital Leeds after a short illness. Barbara was a member of the Society and had latterly served on the Committee. She was well known to many, both within and without the Society in her capacity as Finds Officer at the Wood Hall Project, where she had worked since 1991.

Barbara came into archaeology as a member of The Friends of the York Archaeological Trust. She worked for the West Yorkshire Unit as a member of the Castleford Excavation team both as an excavator and in the finds department. When the Castleford project ended, she continued with the West Yorkshire Unit for several years. Following a short hiatus, Barbara joined the Wood Hall Project as Finds Officer.

Barbara was also a founder member of the Elmsall Excavation Group, formed after local interest was focussed by an Archaeology GCSE Evening Class.

She loved hill-walking, liked Roman and Medieval pottery, admired Admiral Lord Nelson and Richard III, and enjoyed travel. Barbara went with the Society to China, and with her family to the Lake District, the Orkneys, and the Western Isles.

Barbara was a humorous, steadfast, no-nonsense person who called a potsherd what it was! However, she did a fine job when it came to reassembling them, as many who saw her work on display can testify.

Many of us have lost a cherished friend and colleague, who will be sorely missed personally and professionally. She leaves a husband Alan and son Andrew, to whom we extend our deepest sympathy.

S.T.

Members may wish to look back to *PontArch* No 31, Summer 1995, pp 2-3 for Barbara's description of life as a Finds Officer.

EDITORIAL

This is my first *Editorial* since leaving teaching and The King's School behind. When the move first became inevitable, I honestly believed that I would have more time to devote to *PontArch* and the other newsletter that I edit. How wrong I was! In fact retirement has meant a change of emphasis in many aspects of my life, and I have not fully adjusted yet.

To return to *PontArch*, there is so much to include in this issue that we have had to hold over the comprehensive interim report on the 1997 season at Wood Hall. In addition, we are having to split Barbara Stewart's account of *Touring in Turkey* between this and the next issue. It does give us something to look forward to, however.

The St.Aidan's Riverboat Project has taken up a lot of my time lately. Everyone who 'signed up' at the last meeting had the opportunity to take part, and there are lots of

opportunities next year, when we hope to excavate the other boats, and survey the locks, weirs, etc. still extant. When the weather brightens up we will begin there again, and this time there should be space for a few beginners. Give me your details if you wish to be considered.

In closing, I would like to thank Barbara and Simon for contributing to this issue, even though Simon's piece (above) is one that we wish we didn't have to publish. However, in a society with forty years behind it members do come and go, and this is not our first, and nor will it be our last obituary.

On a happier note, I hope that this reaches you in time for Christmas. Needless to say both the Editorial staff, and the Committee wish you all the very best for a Happy Christmas and a peaceful and prosperous New Year.

TOURING IN TURKEY,

by Barbara Stewart.

DAY ONE

On Wednesday 24th September 19 members of the society left Pontefract for the 2 hour journey to Manchester where they boarded an Onar Air aircraft for the 4½ hour flight to Turkey.

On arrival at Izmir Airport we transferred to a coach which took us to our hotel.

Izmir was known as Smyrna by the Greeks. It was an important trading port subjected to many earthquakes and often the focus of war. On the top of the highest hill is the C3 BC fortress of Kadifekale. At the foot of this hill is the Agora, the restored market of ancient Smyrna.

DAY TWO DENIZLI

Leaving our hotel at 9.00am we drove to Ephesus with its famous theatre, baths and library. The hot sun beat down as we wandered amongst the ruins of this famous site, trying to visualise it as it must have once been. We made a stop at the presumed house of the Virgin Mary, a small sanctuary with icons and candles. The Virgin Mary had been cared for by St. John after the crucifixion and this was her last abode. Past endless fields of cotton, tomatoes and un-identified crops we continued our journey to Denizli.

DAY THREE BURSA

We began our coach journey at an early hour and travelled to Pamukkale (Cotton Castle). A huge white cliff rises from the plains. Volcanic spring water rich in minerals cascades over natural terraces forming crystallized stalactites. Unfortunately the water is only allowed to flow on 2 days each week because the source has been so depleted by local hotels drawing the water without due thought to the consequences. The Romans made great use of the hot springs and the remains of Roman baths are to be seen close by in Hierapolis. Several of our group disported themselves in the warm spring water, balancing on the broken columns in the pool, relics from the Roman times which collapsed in ancient earthquakes.

The ruined city of Aphrodisias has many remains of baths, temples and theatres. This city dedicated to the goddess Aphrodite is now a flowery wilderness of toppled marble.

A tortuous journey lasting 1½ hours took us up the mountain to our hotel. It was dark on arrival and we were all ready for bed. The lovely views from the mountain top were only briefly appreciated because we had to make an early descent down the steep winding road into the little town of Bursa.

Bursa was the first capital of the Ottoman Empire. It is called Yesil (green) Bursa because of its many parks and trees and also the Yesil Cami (a green mosque) and the Yesil Turbe (a green mausoleum). The mountain of Uludag is a popular ski resort. In the town square is a statue of Ataturk. Bursa has been a spa since Roman times. The mosques were very impressive and the atmosphere of the town was redolent of other centuries. Bursa is famed for silk