

THE PONTEFRACT AND DISTRICT ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

NUMBER 37. WINTER 1998.

THE SAINT AIDAN'S SITE FOUR SHIP.

See story inside.....



Viewed from the iron bridge, itself a monument to the Industrial Revolution, members begin work.

An occasional newsletter published by the Pontefract & District
Archaeological Society, The Museum, Salter Row, Pontefract, WF8 1BA.

Editor, Eric Houlder, Past President.

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SAINT AIDAN'S UPDATE, a personal view by the Editor.

In the last two issues, I described how the breaching of the river Aire at Allerton Bywater in 1988 had led, nine years later, to the excavation and recording of a wrecked wooden vessel found on the bottom of the pumped-out channel. Since that brief article, work has gone ahead, in some cases only just in front of the giant machines which are tearing up the area in search of coal.

The original vessel and its environs were immediately labelled as Site One. Soon after we finished, this was destroyed, and we moved downstream to Site Two, which comprised a weir, a lock, and a mysterious stone construction in thick undergrowth between river and canal. Fragments of a number of wooden vessels lay jumbled at the tail of the weir, with other pieces, some quite large, lying actually on it.

Documentary research told us that we were working at Methley Old Lock, which was constructed in 1698 when the Aire was first made navigable up to Leeds. Within a century this stretch was completely by-passed by the canal which also lay empty fifty yards away. Thus, site two represented the earliest stage of industrialisation.

Excavation revealed a beautifully-preserved timber floor only broken where large ashlar had fallen in during its demolition.

The ship remains comprised a minimum of two clinker-built (and thus early) vessels and a copper-nailed rowing boat below the weir. However, resting actually on it was the complete sternpost of a small ship with rudder pintles and depth markings. Embedded in gravel fifty yards downstream of the weir was a complete wooden rudder about four metres high, with gudgeons exactly matching the pintles on the weir-fragment. Had they been from the same vessel, or were these measurements standard? Speculation was rife, and usually conjured up a picture of a ship breaking its moorings and going over the weir to disaster on a stormy night. The other ships there certainly suggest an accident blackspot for river craft!

One of the most difficult problems was the mysterious stone construction in the trees. This turned out to have been a dry dock attached to a

shipyard. In the time available it was quite impossible to dig the whole dock out, so we excavated the gates, the inlet and outlet sluices, and longitudinal and transverse sections. These were photographed and finally planned.

Work on the weir revealed a complex construction of timber beams anchored into the riverbed, capped with stone rubble including glass-slag, and finally topped with cut ashlar. We never completed this work, for the contractors were ahead of schedule and their giant machines were cutting into the upstream end of the weir as we rushed to finish planning the downstream end. The dry dock was just downstream of this, and there was time to complete work there before this too was trashed. Indeed, a small group of us spent the August Bank Holiday weekend here, and had a pleasant lunchtime picnic actually in the transverse section. My pictures of this are hardly archaeological photography, but will bring back very pleasant memories for all involved in years to come.

Site Three was a pool of deep water which remained in a bend of the riverbed. We had noticed fragments of



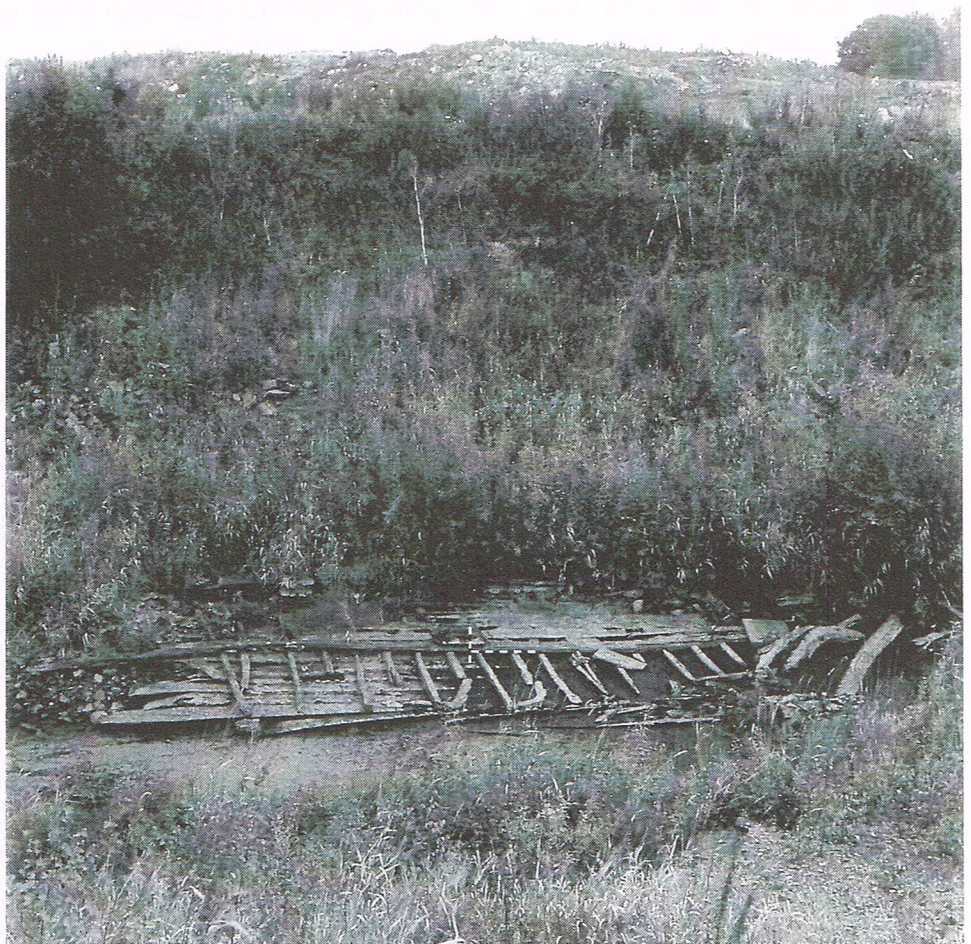
The dry dock wall and gate at Site Two. Scales are metres.

wreckage protruding above the surface on many occasions during the winter. By late September the mining had lowered the water-table so much that a very substantial mast-step fixed to a solid keelson was visible. However, the mud was still too soft to allow us to dig the vessel. Remembering how quickly the contractors were destroying the riverbed, we decided to photograph the wreckage immediately in case of re-flooding or mining activities. Carrying two one-metre scales I gingerly stepped on to the ribs, and began to sink! Leaping on to the keelson gave me a solid foothold, and I placed the scales in a rough 'L' and escaped. Finally I had to retrieve the scales, and this time sent Jacqui who is much smaller and lighter than my thirteen stones. She had no problems.

With pictures 'in the can,' it was decided to leave site three until the mud stabilised, and move downstream to Site Four. This was situated almost under a bridge and comprised a large (the largest yet) wooden ship loaded with coal and surrounded by debris, much of which had been dumped off the bridge when it carried a public road. A car, a van and a motorcycle were the largest items, though over the years they had collected tons of river gravel around and inside them. In discussing the problems of this site with the contractors, they had agreed to clear it for us, and we arrived one morning to find an extremely large bulldozer shoving the gravel clear with effortless ease. Luckily, Simon had experience with heavy plant on other sites, and was able to direct the driver, who removed small trees and bushes with a precision remarkable to see. This site four ship still had a load of coal on board when it sank. The contractors were not interested in what we did with it (they think in thousands of tonnes) so we threw it into the riverbed just below the ship, which proved be the best preserved and most interesting vessel yet.

Late September was a good time in many ways, for the final closure of Wood Hall made many of the professional staff as well as numerous volunteer and student diggers (nearly all P&DAS members) available. In addition, the mellow light and mild weather enabled us to crack on with Site Four.

As we dug down through the cargo the ribs or futtocks,



The Site Three wreck; preliminary record picture before any work on this site.

began to show. Normally they are covered by ceiling planks, which protect the outer timbers and ribs from the cargo, and the latter from the water which naturally seeps into this space. However, few ceiling planks had survived, and the lower layer of coal was cemented to the outer planks by a thick, hard iron-pan which required the use of small picks and hammers to break up.

Again, just like the Site One ship, this vessel had foundered across a riverbed knoll and become hogged just aft of the bow. In addition, the port side had slumped down towards the centre of the channel, breaking the ribs off in a line along the ship just left of the keel and keelson. This latter, a heavy beam above the keel and running the full length of the ship, had been exposed to the current for centuries, and had eroded away almost completely in places.

The diggers working in the bows had further to go down, and seemed to be delving a long way in comparison with their colleagues on the midships and stern parts. Eventually they came down on to stone flags on which still stood the base of a cast-iron cauldron. Nearby was a buckle-type shoe, a pewter spoon, and a ceramic bowl. Clearly this was the galley.

This stage of the work was very photogenic, the afternoon light of early autumn having a warm luminescence, whilst the workers' apparel sometimes complemented and sometimes contrasted with it. Leaving my 'bit,' (one of the perks of being 'staff') I picked up a camera and shot several pictures of my colleagues in action. I was using Agfa film, and the box-end on the back of the camera brought back poignant memories of another ship, another weekend, and a summer thirty years gone.

The next site weekend provided a shock. Continuous rain, plus the accidental opening of a coal-washer, had started to re-fill the riverbed! Not deep, but grey and gooey, and certainly uncrossable.

Work continued on the ship, our ever-expanding spoil heap making a coffer dam against the slowly rising water, which could be heard trickling through the gravel whenever there was a pause in the conversation and banter. As the bow-compartment workers went deeper, other artefacts like more shoes, a plate, and even a complete rigging block, appeared. At this depth, water was continually welling up into the excavation.

By 2-00pm on October 18th the ship was ready for the overall record pictures. Two camera positions were chosen:

- a) from the iron bridge which spans the river just upstream, and
- b) from an overlooking rise on the south bank.

Back on the ship, pictures 'in the can,' someone suggested a group photograph. Why not? Fitting a wide-angle lens I stood by the bows and got the team to stand around the ship facing inboard. A memory-jogger for the future, from the past.

The heavy rain at the end of October obstructed the planning, for the bows were under a metre of water at one point, and there were real fears of the riverbed filling above our level. As it is, the Site Three ship is again beneath the surface. At the time of writing the team is on stand-by to complete the planning of Site Four, and the excavation of Site Three.

Meanwhile a progress report may be seen in one of the first issues of the new *Discover Archaeology* and in a forthcoming issue of *The Dalesman. Current Archaeology*

has also asked for a report in the new year.

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Simon directs the bulldozer with skill and his usual aplomb!

Please remember that if you wish to participate in this excavation you **must be a fully paid-up member** and with some experience of excavation. In addition, you will require the usual hand-tools, waterproofs, food and drink and a willingness to work in very uncomfortable conditions.

A fuller report with slides will be given by Eric, in the form of the Don Lodge Memorial lecture, at our meeting on January 15th 1999.

EDITORIAL

A lot has happened in the archaeology world, both local and international, since I last penned an Editorial for *PontArc*. On the local front we have the Saint Aidan's dig which is absorbing more of members' time. Nationally discoveries seem to be springing out of the ground, whilst on the international scene the new American magazine *Discover Archaeology* (see the advert in this issue) promises to keep us informed on a global level. It is encouraging that the Editor asked your Editor for a brief report on Saint Aidan's for one of the early issues. For readers unfamiliar with international mail order, it is a simple task to subscribe using the form and your Visa Card number. The amount is shown in both US Dollars and Sterling on your statement.

Still with Saint Aidan's, a feature on the dig will appear in a forthcoming issue of *The Dalesman*.

On a sad note, the Wood Hall dig ended its very last season this last September. The team had been shrinking gradually as the various institutions resumed after the Summer, but there were still more than a dozen of us there on the last afternoon. The regular involvement of members there has been most encouraging, and it is a

hopeful sign that John Buglass, our director at St.A. envisages the excavation of many more ships both there and at other riverside sites between here and Goole. Needless to say, members will be kept informed.

As we sadly put away the tools and planning kit at five on the final afternoon, a campervan pulled onto the car park, and Andrew Selkirk, Editor of *Current Archaeology* emerged. He was en-route to a conference in Ripon, and asked for a seven minute tour of the site. Simon obliged, and Andrew requested reports on both digs for his magazine.

The forthcoming Millenium (in 2001, of course) is exercising many minds. What a pity that the compilers of our present calendar were not acquainted with the concept of zero. Things would have been much easier had they begun our era with the year nought, as then the true millenium would have fallen in the year 2000. As to the 2000th anniversary of Christ's birth, that is long past and occurred in 1996; most experts now acknowledge that He was born in 4BC. What a muddle for those with tiny minds to absorb!

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WOOD HALL: THE LAST ANNUAL GROUP PICTURE

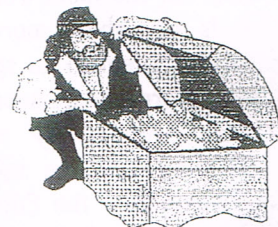


THE NEW TREASURE ACT.

ANALYSIS BY JOHN BOWEN, EDITOR J WAS NEWSLETTER. MEMBER P&DAS.

by kind permission of the author and of the President of the John Wheelwright Archaeological Society. The new treasure act came into force in September replacing the previous law of treasure trove in England and Wales.

Under the new act all finds of treasure must be reported to the coroner within 14 days of the day on which the find was made, or within 14 days of the day on which, wait for it . . . the finder *recognised* that the find might be treasure.



The act will almost certainly have a major effect on the quantity of material likely to be offered to museums in the future.

One important factor to be noted is that the obligation to report finds rests with everyone, including archaeologists.

The act defines the definition of treasure as coins from the same find provided they are 300 years old when found (but if the coins contain less than 10% of gold or silver there must be at least 10 of them). Another definition of treasure is any object other than a coin provided that it contains at least 10% of gold or silver and is at least 300 years old when found. Associated objects are also defined as treasure; That is any object whatever it is made of, that is found in the same place as, or that had previously been together with, another object that is treasure.

Objects that would have been treasure are also defined as treasure. This defines all objects buried with the intention of recovery *made substantially of gold or silver*. That were buried with the intention of recovery and their owner or his heirs cannot be traced.

Implicit in the spirit of the new act is the likelihood that a greater number of finds that are deemed to be treasure will find their way into local museums. A significant change is that there is now no requirement for a coroner to judge whether an object or objects had been deliberately buried with the intention of recovery.

If the find is deemed to be treasure the British museum or the national museums and galleries of Wales will be informed. If no museum wishes to acquire the find the coroner will return the object to the finder after 28 days. If a museum wishes to purchase the find it will be valued by the treasure valuation committee which consists of independent experts.

Rewards will be paid in full to the finder where he or she has permission to be on the land. The finder must also be able to prove that this is indeed the case. If the finder does not remove the whole of a find from the ground but allows archaeologists to excavate the remainder of the find, the original finder will normally be eligible for a reward for the whole find. Rewards will not normally be payable when the find is made by an archaeologist. If the finder has committed an offence in relation to a find, such as trespass or not followed the code of practice then the finder may expect no reward at all or a reduced reward.

However, and here is the crunch folks, you will not be breaking the law if you do not report a find because you do not *initially* recognise it may be treasure!

Failure to report a find of treasure may result in three months imprisonment, or fines of upto £5,000 or both.

The code of practice on the treasure act can be obtained F/O/C from the department for culture media and sport TEL: 0171 211 6200.

Advance notice

1999 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Tempest Anderson Hall, Yorkshire Museum, York
6th February 1999

ELECTION OF OFFICERS The following posts are open for election;

Honorary Auditor
Honorary Programme Secretary
Individual Members Representative

Honorary Editor
Honorary Secretary

Honorary Membership Secretary
Honorary Treasurer

NOMINATIONS

Nominations for Officers of CBA Yorkshire must be received by the Hon. Secretary no later than 14 days before the AGM. They should be made in writing and must be accompanied by a written statement from the person being nominated to indicate their willingness to be elected.

Acting Honorary Secretary : Catherine Buckley, 11 Milton Street, YORK, YO10 3EP

Nominations can be made by any member of the Group who is qualified to vote at the AGM

PROGRAMME 1998-99

LECTURES

October 16th 1998

**"Woodhall Moated Manor
— Recent Results"**

Simon Tomson, B.A., Dip.S.M.Arch, A.I.F.A.

November 20th

"Knights Templars in Yorkshire"

Martyn Kirby

December 18th

"Christmas Kitchen" — Roy Young

January 15th 1999

"The Sunken Ships at St. Aidans Site"

Eric Houlder

February 19th

"Stonehenge in its Context" — J. Barrett

March 19th

"The High Status Anglo-Saxon Settlement at Flixborough" — Dr. Chris Loveluck

April 16th

"Roman York" — P. Ottaway

April 23rd

A.G.M.

All meetings to be held at the Museum,
5 Salter Row, Pontefract. Time 7.15 p.m
Interested Non-Members admission £1
Tel: 722740

EXCURSIONS

MAY 9th Cotswolds

JUNE 14th (Sunday) Levens Hall and Settle

JULY 18th Stockton-on-Tees and
Captain Cook Museum, Marton

AUGUST 15th London

SEPTEMBER 12th Tislington Hall and
Ashbourne

DECEMBER 13th Christmas Outing

HERMITAGE VISITS

May 16th, June 13th, July 5th (Hospital Open Day
July 11th, August 22nd, September 19th

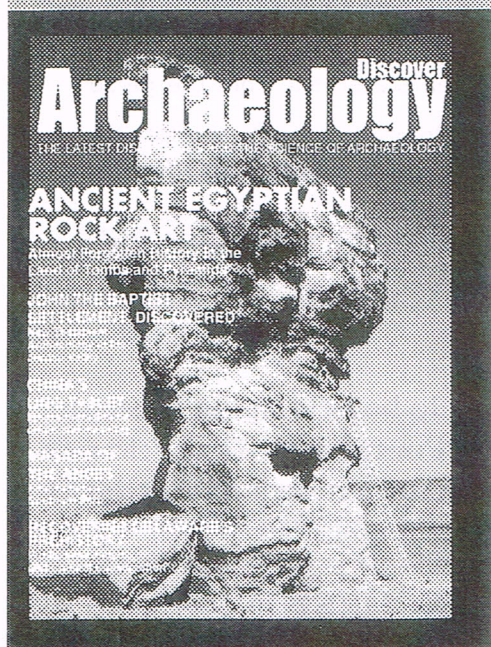
OPEN 2.00 p.m. to 4.00 p.m.
SOUTHGATE ENTRANCE, P.G.I.

Anyone interested please contact
Pauline Wigglesworth (619356) or
Peter Lockett (614107)

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January / February 1999

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