

THE PONTEFRACT AND DISTRICT ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

NUMBER 38, AUTUMN 1999

THEY THINK IT'S ALL OVER.....



Rory McGrath and his Television crew from Screenhouse Productions roughing it up at Saint Aidans.

An occasional newsletter, published by
**THE PONTEFRACT & DISTRICT ARCHAEOLOGICAL
SOCIETY.**

Editor: Eric Houlder, Chairman/Field Director

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THEY THINK IT'S ALL OVER.....

During the final weekend in May, volunteers at St Aidan's were informed that there would be an extra site day in early June. The purpose was to allow a team from Screenhouse Productions, together with television personality Rory McGrath, to make a programme in the series *History Fix* for the new BBC digital Knowledge channel. In preparation, a cameraman and sound-girl had already spent a day on site taking continuity shots, so it was obvious that something was going on.

The choice of Rory McGrath to front an essentially research-based (in the widest sense of the word!) programme may seem surprising, but in fact his role as the British chief in the hilarious Chelmsford 123AD series gives him the same sort of credentials as Tony Robinson has, and we all know how far he has gone in archaeology!!

The plans sounded quite exciting, for Screenhouse intended to bring a real 120 year old Humber Keel up the waterways to a point opposite the site, and film some of the scenes on board. They had already filmed two of our director's sites by this time, so he was quite happy to let them go ahead.

Weather forecasts were not hopeful, so everyone was pleasantly surprised when the day dawned fine and sunny. RJB had supplied new and bright HV waistcoats and helmets which positively glowed in the sunshine. Rory himself was kitted out in a one-piece blue overall, boots and gloves. No wonder he looked hot and bothered, especially at Site Three, which being in an incised bend is something of a suntrap. He turned out to be very approachable, and several of us managed to speak to him during the day. Imogen in particular, will treasure memories of digging alongside a television personality. The accumulated 'street-cred' will certainly be useful at New College next term too!

John and your Field Director had already worked out a course of action for the day, which included excavation,

photography and planning. This quickly went out of the window as constant re-takes became necessary. No wonder that *Time Team* shows no recording; there is never time for this until afterwards. Our afternoon programme on the **June** actually began after 5-00pm.

June is clinker-built of iron, and is probably the final development of the much older vessels being excavated. She certainly looked wonderful under sail, with a surprising turn of speed. A superb picture of her at Lemonroyd lock, by Paul Medlock, appeared in the Pontefract and Castleford Express shortly afterwards.

The day ended very late, but the weather remained good throughout. Switched-on members wishing to check the programme details should access the Website:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/knowledge/historyfix>
for further information.

A member recently commented to the Editor about the amount of publicity the Society is now receiving, from the excellent write-ups in our own *Pontefract and Castleford Express*, via BBC digital TV, to the extensive report in *Current Archaeology* No.163. This is certainly because of the intrinsic interest and importance of St Aidan's site, which is often taken for granted by participants. It is also the result of hard work and pushing by your Field Director, who tries to oversee all items reaching the media. If he has the material, he can push it in the proper quarters, so members with news of other Society activities, please take note.

Another point worth mentioning is that non-digging members deserve the credit for this nationally-important dig just as much as participants. Simply by being members, they are adding their contribution in the form of their membership fees and support. This is an important project and reflects credit on us all.

.....IT IS NOW!

NOTES FROM COMMITTEE

Following the 1999 AGM in April, a number of changes were put into operation to make the work of the Committee more efficient.

Norman Blackburn was co-opted onto the Committee as our representative for town centre matters. This appointment of someone with a particular interest in the present town should enable us to keep abreast of developments and make our views known.

Three sub-committees were formed to oversee the main aspects of the Society's work. Our Vice-President, Bill

Booth is Chairman of the Hermitage and Castle sub-committee, with responsibility for the guide service. The Excavation and Survey sub-committee is chaired by the Field Director/Chairman, whilst the Excursions sub-committee has Secretary Pauline and Treasurer Peter in charge. It is hoped that this sharing of responsibility will ease the individual burdens on our senior officers.

For some time we have been considering changing our letterheads. The original design was a product of the 1950s, and all subsequent re-printings have been based

on it. For the new century, the Committee asked Geoff Leathley to design a completely new logo. This was combined with a legible text-font, and produced by Harris Bros with matching envelopes. The new letterhead is simple, tasteful and contemporary, whilst echoing our traditions and achievements. Our grateful thanks go to Geoff for his unique design.

Members present at the AGM may remember the problems faced by the Chairman in locating and reading the minutes, caused partly by the antiquated system of writing them by hand in a ledger. We have now changed this system so that the minutes are typed or word-processed after each meeting, and kept in a ring-binder.

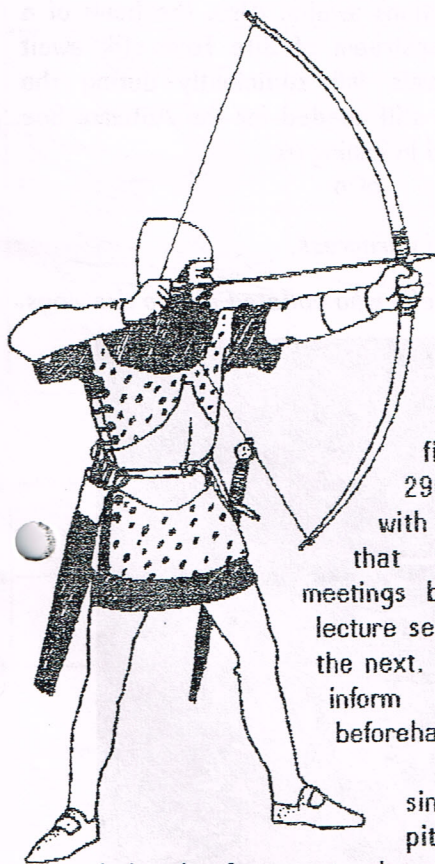
For some time your Committee has been considering how to mark the year 2000AD, the final year of the Millenium. It was finally decided to hold a symposium on the theme of archaeology's contribution to the history of Pontefract & District, not forgetting the wider picture. Details are still

being worked out, but members will naturally be kept informed, and of course be given priority for places.

Committee noted that the Society's subscriptions to both Current Archaeology and British Archaeology, the latter carrying with it membership of national CBA, had lapsed. It was decided to renew these immediately. Our copies will probably be kept in our cupboard in the Museum, and loaned out with a booking system. As the Society sometimes figures prominently in these general-interest archaeology periodicals, it is sensible to subscribe to them.

Finally, in an effort to update the Society's hardware, we have purchased an overhead projector (OHP). Several recent speakers have requested the use of one, and now that no member of the Committee has access to one professionally, it makes sense for the Society to own its own.

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BLOOD RED ROSES

The Channel Four programme about the skeletons from the Towton Hall burial pit finally appeared on June 29th. One of the problems with a society such as ours is that there are no proper meetings between the end of one lecture season and the beginning of the next. Thus it was impossible to inform members about this beforehand.

It is now over two years since the discovery of the pit, whilst foundations were being dug for an extension at Towton Hall. The original excavation was done by West Yorkshire under contract to North Yorkshire, and after recording, the remains were taken to Bradford University where they are currently the subject of intensive study.

As the first medieval battle casualties to be properly excavated to modern standards, the skeletons yielded an immense amount of data, which will eventually appear in

the monograph which we understand is almost ready for the printers. The range of injuries and the sheer number on each person graphically illustrate the barbarity of medieval warfare.

What is not generally known is the contribution of members to the work, for Robert McNaught was working for the West Yorkshire Unit on the excavation, and your Editor, wearing his hat as specialist archaeological photographer, took the detailed pictures for the monograph.

Sad to relate, a prominent member of a society not a million miles away, deliberately broke the embargo on first publication of academic material. Apparently, having been loaned a photograph on condition that it was not published, he then published it on the internet. We are glad to hear that at least one of the societies of which he is a member has disowned him; we are still waiting to hear what the other society will do!

Next year's Don Lodge Memorial Lecture, by our Chairman, is on the Wars of the Roses, with particular emphasis on the Towton Hall casualties. Needless to say, this is with the permission of the University and the authors.

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SAINT AIDAN'S EXCAVATION UPDATE.

Since the last Newsletter, work has concentrated on Site Three, which until the Autumn of 1998 was totally submerged.

As levels fell, caused by the approach of the mine, it became possible to dig the site and it soon became clear that there were two vessels here, lying at about sixty degrees to each other. The first to be noticed lay alongside the south bank, bows upstream. The second lay with its stern out into the channel and its bow buried and inaccessible in the bank. Its port (left) side probably rested against the stem of the first vessel when it originally foundered.

Judging by the position of the vessels, it is likely that both were deliberately stripped and sunk torevet the bank on the outside of this rather sharp bend. Why one extends into the channel is not difficult to guess, for all the signs point to it having broken free whilst partly sunk, and unintentionally blocked the channel at its deepest point.

This ship obviously caused an obstruction on the riverbed, for a thick deposit of gravel built up in, and around it. The scouring of the current here soon broke through the sides of this ship, leaving its keelson suspended like a slender bridge across the bows of the first ship, which being parallel to the bank suffered far

less damage.

This latter, had the most complete ceiling planks (bottom lining of the hold) yet seen on this site. Following the planning of these they were lifted and the area between them and the outer strakes cleaned. During this procedure a 1773 halfpenny of George III was found lying head down on the planking. After lifting, the obverse, protected for 200 years by the wood, was found to be in perfect condition, whilst the reverse, exposed to riverwater for perhaps as long, was scoured smooth. Both sides were untarnished copper, a phenomenon never before seen by the terrestrial diggers but apparently not uncommon on underwater sites.

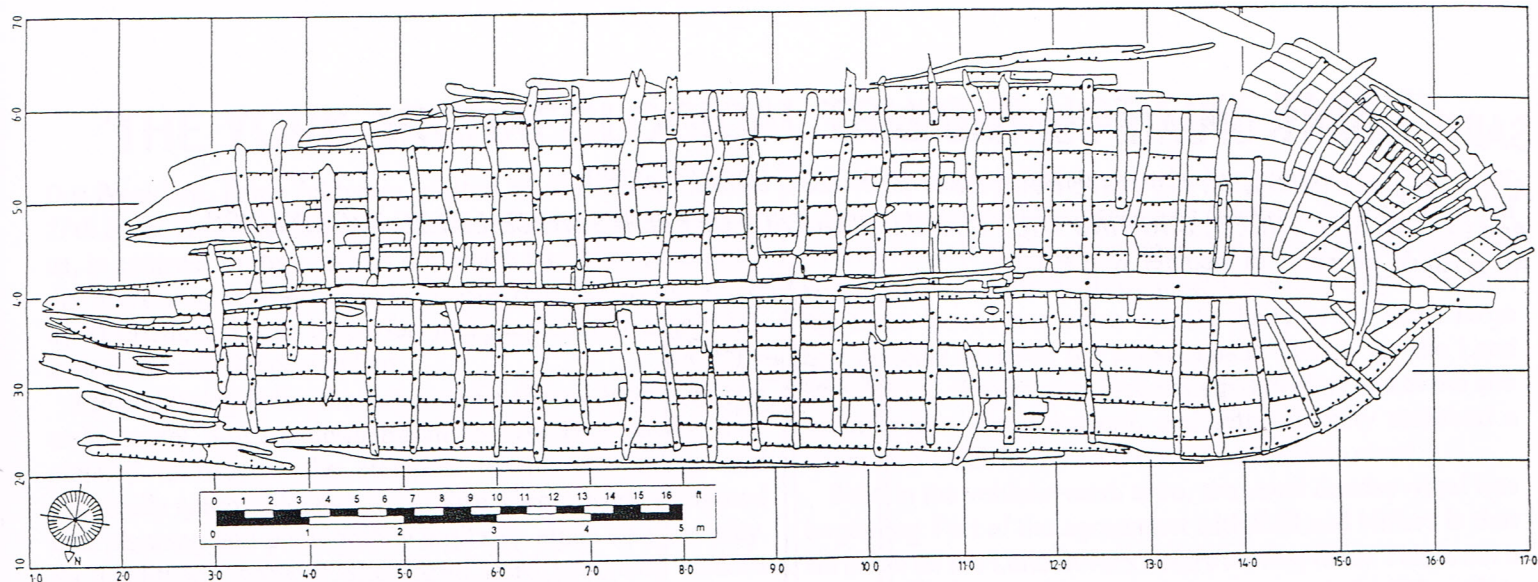
We are now in the final stages of recording at Site Three. Little remains to be done there except the completion of the plans, and then the sawing off of sections. However, plenty remains to be done at Site Four where further work to expose the underside of the ship, and more sawing of sections awaits. Also, the bows of a carvel-built vessel downstream of Site Four still await recording if water levels fall sufficiently during the summer. Volunteers are still needed for the Autumn. See Eric if you are interested in joining us.

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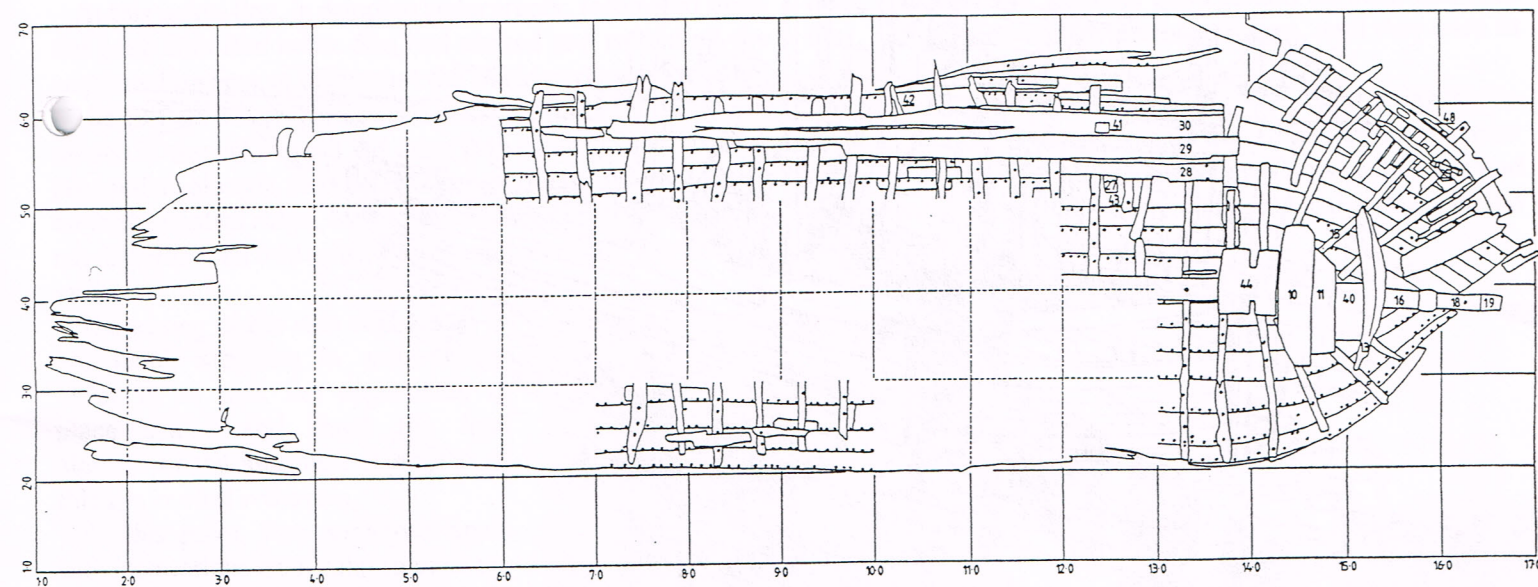
This page... Site three seen from the south bank with excavation and recording in progress.

Opposite page... First published plans of Site Four, courtesy of member Nick Kelly who collated all the drawings.

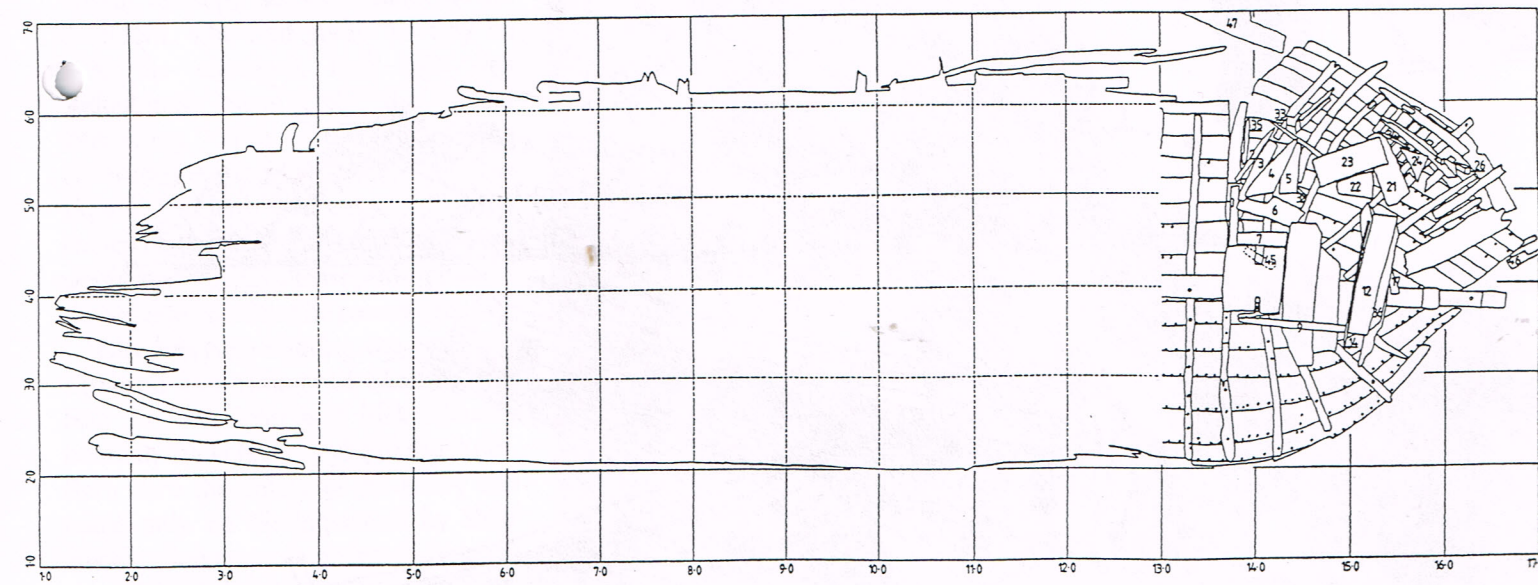




Layer 3 - Complete excavation & removal of fixed materials, exposing barge substructure.



Layer 2 - Partial excavation, exposing fixed materials.



Layer 1 - Partial excavation, showing deposited materials.

Record of Excavated Material										Site drawing and recording by members: Nautical Archaeology Society N.E., Pontefract & District Archaeological Society, Nicholas M. Kelly Ltd. Drawing compilation and presentation by Nicholas M. Kelly Ltd.	
Item	See Drg. No.	Item	See Drg. No.	Item	See Drg. No.	Item	See Drg. No.	Item	See Drg. No.	Item	See Drg. No.
1	99/200/02/2	9	99/200/02/2	17	Discarded	25	Structure	33	99/200/02/2	41	99/200/02/2
2	99/200/02/2	10	99/200/02/2	18	Structure	26	99/200/02/1	34	99/200/02/2	42	99/200/02/2
3	99/200/02/2	11	99/200/02/2	19	Structure	27	Structure	35	99/200/02/2	43	99/200/02/2
4	99/200/02/2	12	99/200/02/2	20	Discarded	28	99/200/02/1	36	99/200/02/2	44	99/200/02/2
5	99/200/02/2	13	99/200/02/2	21	99/200/02/2	29	99/200/02/1	37	Discarded	45	99/200/02/2
6	99/200/02/2	14	99/200/02/2	22	99/200/02/2	30	99/200/02/1	38	Discarded	46	99/200/02/1
7	Discarded	15	Structure	23	99/200/02/2	31	Discarded	39	Discarded	47	99/200/02/1
8	Discarded	16	Structure	24	99/200/02/2	32	99/200/02/2	40	99/200/02/2	48	99/200/02/2

Client: N.A.S., N.E.
P.D.A.S.
Project: St Aidans - Ribbed Excavation
Site: Site 4 - Boat 4
Detail: Stratigraphic Record of Excavation
Drawn: N.M. Kelly
Date: 04.06.99
Scale: 1/20 At A0
Drg No: 99/200/02/1
Revision:

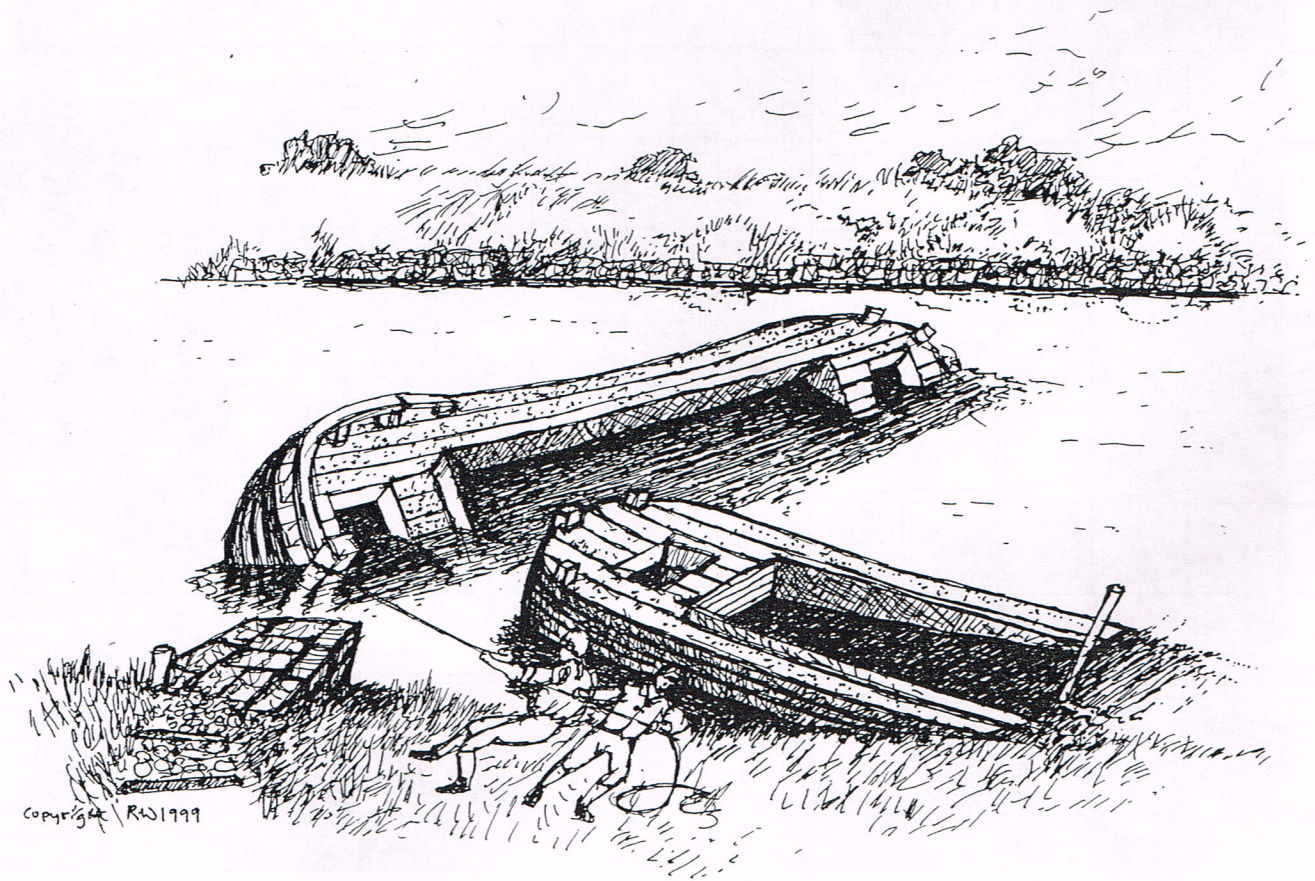
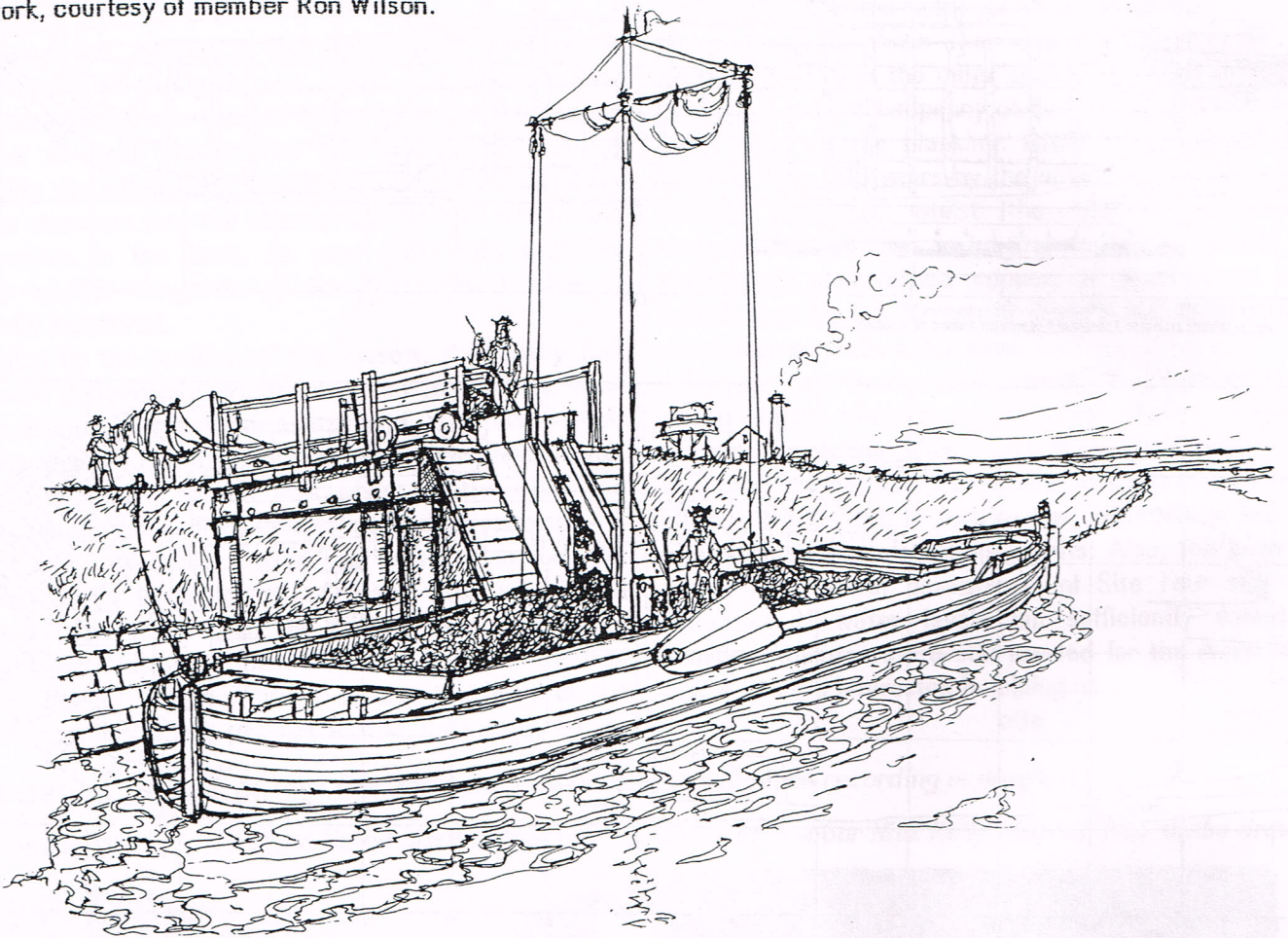


SAINT AIDAN'S UPDATE CONTINUED....

Artist's reconstructions of: TOP: SITE FOUR AS IT MAY HAVE LOOKED c1790.

And BELOW, SITE THREE, SHOWING THE ASSUMED SEQUENCE OF EVENTS WHICH LED TO THE SINKINGS.

All artwork, courtesy of member Ron Wilson.



"THE YORK ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST IS NOT LIKE THIS!"

Our President, Peter Addyman, visited St Aidan's on Sunday 27th June. From the beginning the weather conspired against us, in contrast to the previous day which had been pleasantly dry and warm, Sunday began in pouring rain, but this stopped by 10-00am, and John began ferrying people out to Site Three in the one Land Rover supplied.

After showing Peter the two vessels there, John took him and several diggers downstream to Site Four where they planned to recover the stempost of the ship there, and eventually return. Meanwhile, at Site Three, work continued with planning and photography until rain again stopped play. By lunchtime, those at Site Three were becoming anxious about the group in the vehicle.

At this point, Roz, in dripping waterproofs, scrambled down the bank with bad news. She had walked and waded all the way from Site Four to tell us that the whole party was stranded in the vehicle which was bogged down. Apparently, the slurry on one of the link-tracks hid deep ruts made by mine trucks. Proceeding along it, the Land Rover had run its differentials up on to the central ridge, leaving the wheels high, but definitely not dry. Roz then told us to hang on, and made her way back to assist.

The easing of the rain enabled us to eat lunch standing in waterproofs. Three of us took the opportunity to place scales and shoot the final pictures of the structure of Boat A at this site in a lull in the rain.

At this point, Roz appeared again with instructions from John to pack up, and carry the gear up the bank. On arrival up top, we were met by the President, who had made his way on foot, his comment that this was undoubtedly one of the most interesting sites currently being excavated was heartening, but the sight of him with mud caked up to the knees drove home the fact that we would have to carry **everything** back if the vehicle could not be recovered.

With everyone sharing the load, we slithered and staggered back to Site Four to find John and Nick actually beneath the vehicle, trying to dig it out. Both were the colour of the slurry and could only be distinguished by their voices. Someone expressed surprise that Nick did not have a collapsible bulldozer in his pack somewhere!

Clearly the equipment could not be left there, and we continued walking.

Somewhere along the mine road a bag containing one of your Editor's professional cameras was dropped. As the Editor fell heavily himself at the same time, it is not surprising that the instrument was quite badly damaged; the only surprise is that the three lenses and extra camera-body in the same large bag actually survived the same impact. Luckily for the Land Rover party, the group on foot managed to alert one of the site security men. He drove out, and with difficulty attached a chain with which he pulled the stranded vehicle clear.

Back in the vehicle-wash area, the usual Sunday ritual was beginning. Part of the agreement with RJB and Millers is that we clean all the Land Rovers before leaving them. This is not a problem as there are excellent power-wash facilities. This time, however, the facilities were turned on John and Nick first, both outside and inside their clothes, until they were fit to go into the shower.

It rained again as we drove off the site. What a day for the President's first visit to a Society dig. However, his comment to your Editor as we trudged, burdened down with tools and equipment, across the muddy mine should go down in the Society's archives,

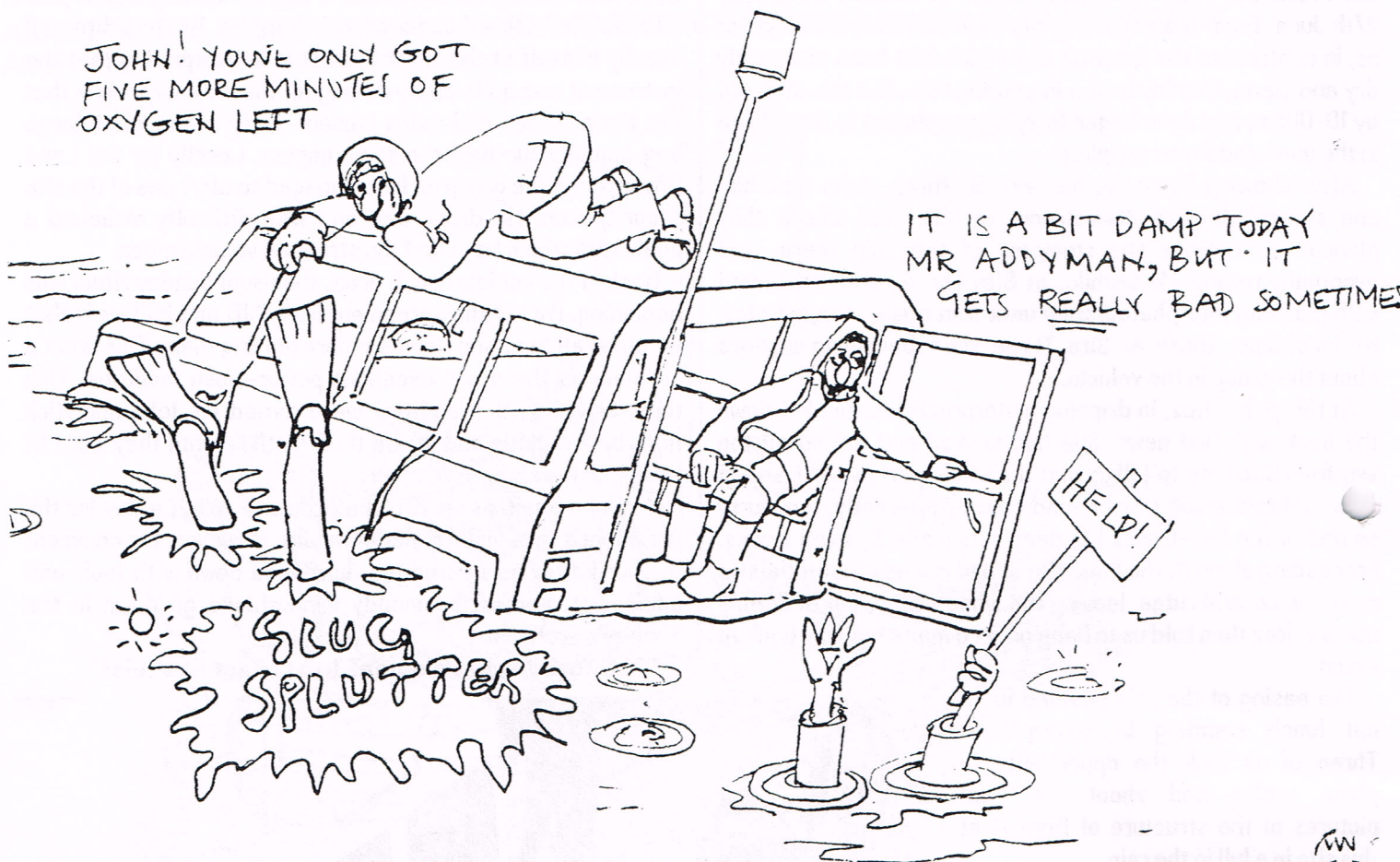
"The York Archaeological Trust is not like this!"



Our President, (bottom right corner) watching attempts to dig out the Land Rover

PRESIDENT'S VISIT.....

JOHN! YOU'VE ONLY GOT FIVE MORE MINUTES OF OXYGEN LEFT



IT IS A BIT DAMP TODAY MR ADDYMAN, BUT IT GETS REALLY BAD SOMETIMES

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ODDS AND ENDS

Having had chance to see three issues of the new US magazine *Discovering Archaeology*, a subsidiary of *Scientific American*, we must give it our Editorial approval. Remembering the geographical basis of the readership there is naturally an American bias in the articles, but there is also excellent coverage of world, European and British archaeology, including our own St Aidan's dig. Content is pitched at a reasonable level, and controversial topics are faced squarely. Excellent value.

In early May your F/D was asked to view a collection of surface finds from the field in Wentbridge parish alongside the A639 in which we dug the Roman site fifteen years ago. Liz Salter had amassed sacks full of

coarseware including BB1, BB2, Cantley, Nene Valley, and many others, but **NO** Samian. There was also Roman building material such as tegulae, hypocaust tiles, and bricks. The site still hides something of some size. Some of us still believe that there was a villa in the vicinity.

A tongue-in-cheek feature in the *Sunday Times* of 11th July suggesting that Robin Hood was not as masculine as previously believed, prompted the *Yorkshire Post* to contact your Chairman. The resulting short article appeared on the Monday following, and the contact thus gained also produced a short illustrated feature on St Aidan's on the next Friday. Meanwhile, our massive presence in *Current Archaeology* has not escaped notice.

P&DAS contact numbers:

Treasurer for subscriptions etc.: 614107.

Secretary for programme etc.: 619356.

Chairman/Field Director for finds & Editorial: 702995.

If your matter is not urgent, please wait until the next meeting to consult the relevant officer.