

Golden Jubilee. History of the Bridgwater and District Archaeological Society. 1963 – 2013

At a public meeting on 14th January 1963, attended by nine people, the BRIDGWATER FIELD CLUB was launched. Its aims were to study the history and archaeology of Bridgwater and district, and to observe and record all excavations in the area. The chairman was Trevor Miles and the secretary was Anne, his wife. A lively programme of fortnightly talks, field visits and small scale excavations was arranged. The subscription was £1 for adults and 2/6d for students. The membership grew; early members including myself, Paul Bovett, Carol Hunter, later Paul's wife, Stephen Croad, John Maxwell, Lorna Watts, later Philip Rahtz's wife, Charles Langdon, Madge Wolstenholme, later Charle's wife, John and Jo Silby, Bob Nesbitt and Dudley Wallace.

Early speakers included Jim Hancock of Bristol who took air photos and Keith Gardner on Lundy. We had series of lectures by Ted Mason in 1963-4 and by Barry Cunliff in 1965. Visits included Flatholm, Avebury and Mrs. Minter's excavation at Hound Tor. Our first excavation was at North Street prior to rebuilding, too far west to find the town moat. Some members assisted on Philip Rahtz's excavation of the Cannington early medieval cemetery. In the winter of 1963-4, Trevor Miles led an emergency excavation of a Roman Villa at Crossfield Farm at Spaxton in poor weather conditions. We managed to rescue part of the mosaic by lifting it in blocks of frozen soil. Recently this section of mosaic has been restored and is now on view in the Blake Museum.(1)

In 1964 the present name THE BRIDGWATER AND DISTRICT ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY was adopted. In 1965 Trevor Miles left for Alcester and Madge Langdon became chair succeeded in 1969 by Mr. J. F.(Jack) Lawrence.(2) Bob Nesbitt was both secretary and treasurer between 1964 and 1970.

In 1968 several members assisted in an excavation by Henrietta and Trevor Miles on an important Iron Age/Romano British site at Westonzoyland.

In 1971 previous to the construction of the M5 motorway some members volunteered to survey sections of the route and several discoveries were made. Among these were a C16 post mill at Chedzoy Lane excavated by Trevor Miles and further discoveries at Crandon Bridge(Bush Marsh), a Roman port, excavated by

Madge Langdon and Peter Fowler. In 1973 Madge excavated the upper layers of the infill of the castle moat on the 'May and Hassell' site now under Sedgemoor District Council offices.

Between 1975 and 1979 our then chairman, Major R. Pike, found a great deal of Roman pottery in the river bank at Comwich. In 1977 a notable visit was made to Dr. John Coles's excavation of the Sweet Track on the Somerset levels. From 1985-1987 there were several digs at the early medieval cemetery on Wembdon Hill directed successively by Madge Langdon, Humphrey Wood and Bob Croft.

Between 1993 and 2003 Peter Ellson carried out a series of excavations of Roman, medieval and later sites in Bawdrip(Ford Farm), Stawell and East Lyng by getting permission from the landowners. He was ably assisted by Hamish Ramsay and other society members. Each excavation was fully reported in our annual newsletter which Peter edited. During this time notable visits included Fenny Castle, Bossington, Lundy(with Keith Gardner) and Steepholm.

Since we have enjoyed a series of residential visits organised by Jennifer May and Sandra Coate which have allowed us to explore further afield in the following areas:- Cornwall(1999), East Sussex(2001), Brittany(2003), West Suffolk(2005), North Wales and Anglesey(2007) and West Wales(20011). In June of this year(2013) we did a day visit to Dartmoor in memory of Sandra who died last year.

Our base since 1976 has been the Blake Museum and in 1987 we assisted David Dawson, then County Museums Officer, in arranging the Archaeological Gallery downstairs. In 2009 we rearranged this gallery in its new site upstairs and in 2012-2013 we put all the artefacts into new cases.

References 1. List of BDAS excavations 1963 – 2013 with references. (to follow)

2. List of BDAS officers 1963- 2013 (to follow).