



# Southampton Archaeology Society

## April 2022 Newsletter

Dear members

I hope you've had a relaxing Easter break, with trees and blossom bursting into life in the recent fine weather. Although Covid restrictions have gone, the virus is still with us so I hope you're all keeping safe and well.

In the last three months we've had some really stimulating lectures:

February's talk by Francis Wenban-Smith looked at **The Victorian Discovery of Palaeolithic Southampton**, when many bifacial stone tools or hand axes were found by collectors at sites in Southampton, while almost none have been reported since then; and he discussed possible reasons for this. In March Dr Paul Everill, a former member of Southampton Archaeology Unit, spoke about **Nokolakevi/Archaeopolis**, a Georgian fortress dating from the 4<sup>th</sup> century on the Colchian Plain, where Paul has worked with students from Georgia and UK for many years (reported in this issue). There was a change to the talk in April as the original speaker Jenny Durrant was unwell, and Matt Garner nobly stepped up to talk about **Coins, Combs & Crucibles: production and trade in Saxon Hamwic**, based on Matt's long experience and knowledge of excavating in Hamwic, with some fascinating anecdotes and revelations.

Our Study Day **Bargate to Civic Centre: historic buildings of Southampton** is to be held on 18<sup>th</sup> June 2022 (see notice below and attached booking form). Many thanks to Sue Davies for her review of **A Walk up the Avenue**, and to Mandy Kesby for use of her notes for the report on Nokolakevi. Details of the new SAS twitter account is given by Sam Edwards and we're grateful to him for setting up the account; and we're publishing Social Media guidelines for administration of this and our Facebook pages.

Our May meeting will be the 2022 **Annual General Meeting** (notice attached) when subscriptions become due, and they may be made in advance by bank transfer or by cheque/cash in person. No change this year, but due to expected price rises we shall be proposing a rise in subscriptions for 2023/24. We'll also see changes within the committee as Martyn Dowell is standing down as Chair, and Chris Evans is retiring and we thank them both for many years' service. We look forward to welcoming new members on to the committee, and we'll be revealing details of our programme for the autumn and early next year.

We hope to see you soon at the AGM and Study Day.

Sarah



## Southampton Archaeology Society

### Study Day 2022

**Bargate to Civic Centre: historic buildings of Southampton**  
**Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> June 10.30am to 4.30pm**

Southampton Art Gallery Lecture Theatre, Civic Centre SO14 7LY

£20 to members, £24 non-members, £14 f/t students & U 18s

To book please email: [southamptonarchaeology@gmail.com](mailto:southamptonarchaeology@gmail.com)

## Report on **Nokolakevi-Archaeopolis – the triple walled fortress of Lazika** by Dr Paul Everill



Overview of the site of Nokolakevi-Archaeopolis Photo: P.Everill

Paul Everill worked with Southampton Council Archaeology Unit, and later with Cambridge Archaeology Unit. He joined a colleague who was working in Georgia, and they go there most years. The site lies in

western Georgia by the Tekhuri river opposite the Colchian plain, a crossroads of major routes between eastern Europe and western Asia in the South Caucasus. Byzantine records indicate that the site is very old and it was named Archaeopolis ('old town'); the triple walled fortress has had a number of names.

### Geographical and historical context

The Georgian people see themselves as European although the country lies outside the official definition of Europe. To the south their territory adjoins Armenia and Azerbaijan with Russia to the north, and it has two climate zones separated by the Caucasian range. Western Georgia enjoys a lush Mediterranean climate, while the east is arid and more extreme. The Greeks considered this area as the edge of their world.



Part of the site with the distant Caucasian range. Photo: P.Everill

Nokolakevi lies on a spur of the hills at the east of the Colchian Plain, famed as the land where Jason and the Argonauts sought the Golden Fleece: at one time sheep's fleeces were used to sift gold from the rivers, which possibly gave rise to this myth. There is evidence of trade in the late Bronze Age, 12<sup>th</sup> century bc, with Mycenaean colonies on the Colchian coast. The Kingdom of Colchis grew rich in classical times from trade with Greek colonies along the Black Sea coast, with finds of 6<sup>th</sup> century bc coins, and export of wine to Greece (the area is still well known for its wine). During the last millennium bc the area was ravaged by Roman general Pompey and his army in the Mithridatic Wars. In the first century AD the tribe of Laz came to dominate in Colchis, and the area became a buffer zone from the people to the north of the Caucasus. Lazika/Nokolakevi was their military and administrative centre. In 6<sup>th</sup> century bc Byzantium and Laziki became allies in a war against the Sassanid Persian empire, known as the Great War of Egrisis. After the death of Justinian in 6<sup>th</sup> century AD, the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries AD were known as the Golden Age of Georgia; the area had been invaded by Arabs who were driven out and the Bagrationi family unified the country. Later Turks invaded from the south and were driven out by King David IV, helped by the 1<sup>st</sup> Crusade and their last great Queen Tamar. The Golden Age was brought to an end by the Mongol invasion in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, when Georgia became a Christian enclave among Moslem peoples: Ottoman Turks and Persians. In 1918 the country was annexed by Russia and was known as the Trans-Caucasian Democratic Republic.

### The excavation site

The location of the fortress above the river allowed the garrison to monitor the mountain roads and river routes. The remains of the 4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> century Byzantine town extends 18-19ha, with a recognisable street plan including buildings such as churches and bath houses, and walls which follow the hillside up to the Citadel above the town, with a rock-cut tunnel to the river. The town's foundation myth tells of an alliance of King Kuji with Parnavaz king of East Georgia, to defeat the despot Avaz: Kuji married Parnavaz' daughter

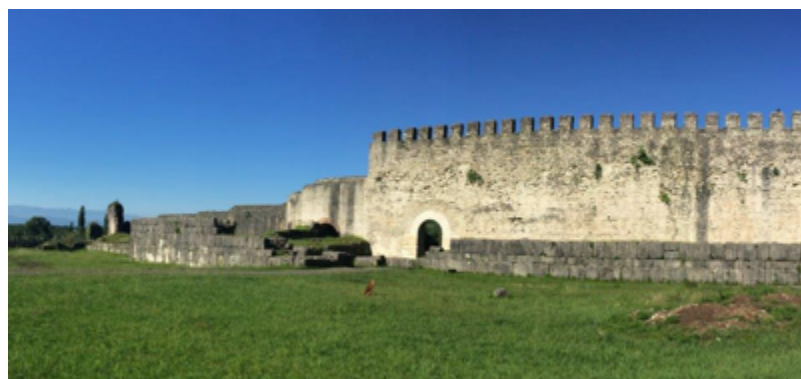
and united east and west Georgia, an event celebrated yearly in the festival of Egrisoba (no support by any archaeological evidence exists for this myth). The fortress of Archaeopolis was described by Procopius in the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD, and it was first identified as Nokolakevi in 1839 by Swiss traveller Dubois de Montpéroux, who sketched a recognisable Byzantine church backed by a 'folly'. Excavations began much later, in November 1930 until February 1931: German archaeologists from Weimar collaborated with the Russians to trace the walls of Nokolakevi. Local people cleared the hillside of vegetation (it's now again covered by woodland) and the archaeologists made their HQ in the former local hospital building. Few records survive apart from images, but it was reported that a collection of gold coins was found in one of the towers. Some survey work was undertaken between 1930 and 1973, when a programme of excavation and conservation began with a team from the Simon Janaschia Museum in Tbilisi, continuing for 25 years. It was very well funded and concrete work was provided to preserve and restore the walls. This is a very isolated, rural spot so the archaeologists requested supplies of electricity and water to be brought to their site, and diverted these supplies to the town. In 1991 Georgia became independent of USSR, followed by economic collapse, civil war and ethnic conflict, when only small scale work was possible.

### The 'Anglo-Georgian Expedition' 2001 -2019



Paul became co-director of the expedition in 2002 and since then western technology has been introduced with training in the use of methods such as thermoluminescence and OSL. Starting modestly with just 7 or 8 students and archaeologists, up to now more than 260 students from Georgia, Britain and elsewhere have been trained there. The two trenches have expanded over fourteen years, with more than 3.5 metres' depth of complex stratified deposits uncovered. Veterans have been working with them since 2017 on wellbeing exercises, and in 2019, their last season at Nokolakevi, Ukrainian veterans were also involved.

There is evidence here of human activity from the mid-5<sup>th</sup> millennium bc (Chalcolithic or Copper Age), and Bronze Age finds include fishing and loom weights, arrowheads and a mace head, dated by OSL. Two-headed zoomorphic figurines of the Iron Age (8<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> century bc), found only at Nokolakevi and at Vani (across the Colchian Plain), may be related to iron-smelting or perhaps sacrificial objects, linked to a boggy area with evidence of a palaeo-channel. There are traces of large limestone blocks dating to the 6<sup>th</sup>- 5<sup>th</sup> centuries bc, suggesting a significant settlement at that time. Continuity of occupation is indicated from 4<sup>th</sup>- 1<sup>st</sup> centuries bc, with multiple phases of timber framed structures resting on stone sills: this is echoed in modern building techniques using timber on a stone plinth, to avoid contact with the boggy ground. From the late Hellenistic period buildings fell into disrepair as part of the site was abandoned to marsh.



Investigation of the wall foundations has revealed three different construction methods, including a 'Roman' type of fortification with massive limestone blocks. But other walls are less substantial, and seem to have been built without much regard to the alignment of earlier features.

*View of walls showing variation in construction methods.*

*Photo: P.Everill*

Little metalwork has survived in the wet conditions, and possibly much of the material was re-used at the time. Burials have been recovered from trenches A (28) and B (40+), some of which seem to have been hastily dug and are possibly the result of conflict. Radio-carbon dates have been obtained through the

local museum service for the period of the Arab assault, but lack of funding means few burials have been dated. Strontium isotope analysis of the remains suggests most individuals examined were born or raised in or near to Nokolakevi; and in the Hellenistic period millet (C4 plants) appears to be a dominant element in the diet. Paul and colleagues visited the site of a 'lost' fortress in 2016 to undertake trial trenching, and the next year they opened a trench and were able to identify the site of Onoguris, from pottery with elaborate stamped decoration dated to ~ 646 AD.

The team hope to return in 2022, after two years' absence due to restrictions on travel. The local people are warm and welcoming, the food and wine great and the weather is beautiful!

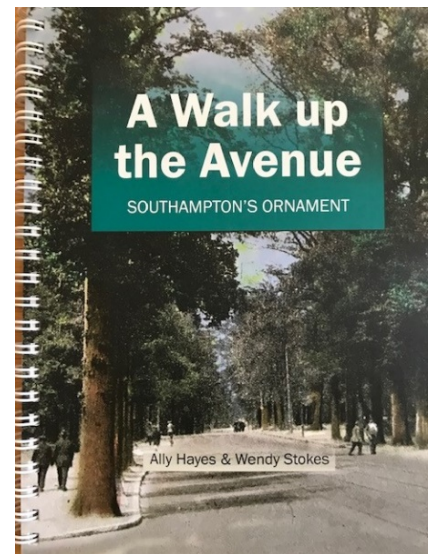
*Many thanks to Mandy Kesby for the use of her notes on this lecture.*

Sarah Hanna

### **A Walk up the Avenue: Southampton's Ornament – by Ally Hayes and Wendy Stokes**

Ally Hayes and Wendy Stokes from the Bevois Mount History Group have written this well-researched, easy to read guidebook to accompany a walk up the Avenue from London Road at its southern starting point to Burgess Road. For all but the expert, this book will increase your knowledge of both the history of the Avenue and of Southampton more widely.

The book describes existing and former buildings along the Avenue and some of the people who lived in them, along with points of interest on Southampton Common. It is full of fascinating facts and interesting nuggets. Did you know that prior to 1758 the main route out of Southampton to Portsmouth and London went via Rockstone Lane; or that all YMCA hostels are called George Williams House as a mark of respect for the YMCA's founder?



There are a series of six maps at the beginning which show the position and corresponding number in the text of the 49 points of interest. Forty of these fall between London Road and the southern entrance to the Common so it is possible to divide this into two walks, one focussing on the first forty points and the second taking in a wider walk around the edges of the Common that abut the Avenue.

The book is ring-bound with coated pages that could withstand being caught in the rain or pulled in and out of a large pocket. If you follow the walk in numerical order of the points of interest, it includes a certain amount of crossing and re-crossing the Avenue, and an alternative would be to take in all the items on one side of the Avenue, as far as you wish to go and then down the other side in a loop. Some of the items are supported by several pages of information, which I found a bit long to read at the side of the road, especially when reading out aloud to someone else. However, salient points were easy to extract and I enjoyed reading the greater detail when I got home. It was certainly an enjoyable and informative way to spend a couple of hours.

A point to note: item 22 – The milestones: The first milestone is inaccurately positioned on Map 1 and was found further up Asylum Green nearly opposite Archers Road.

Sue Davies

*Published by Indigo Press, Bevois Mount, pp89, 2021. RRP £12.00. (Also sold at October Books, Portswood).*

## Southampton Archaeology Society News

### Funeral of Jean McCormac

*from Martyn Dowell*

We recently received the sad news that one of our long term members, Mrs Jean McCormac had passed away on 15th February at Southampton University Hospital after a short illness. Jean will be remembered by many members as a former treasurer of SCMAS (nowSAS) and she regularly attended lectures and Study Days into her 90s, often travelling by bus from her home in Hythe.

Two members of SAS attended Jean's funeral on 15<sup>th</sup> March, at the Hinton Woodland Burial Ground near Christchurch. We heard about Jean and her husband Patrick's interesting lives, they travelled very widely and lived in many different places on account of his work, in particular the Middle East. Jean had taken a great interest in the wildlife and the history of those places, whilst teaching PE in schools. When they settled back in the UK, she continued with these interests and taught PE and Spanish locally. She took a special interest in nature on the Isle of Wight, and had long supported a donkey sanctuary there. She also belonged to a society fostering closer relations between the people of Britain and the Middle East. In addition, Jean regularly supported our society until quite recently, having been a committee member a long while ago. We send our thoughts and sympathy to Jean's family and friends.

### **New twitter account for SAS: @SotonArchaeoSoc**

I'm Sam Edwards, a co-opted member of the SAS committee, who asked me to help with publicity. The society has benefitted from a Facebook account for a few years now, and it was suggested that a twitter account would also be useful as it's faster paced and can be used to post flyers for our events, 'retweet' (i.e. share them) as reminders, to post interesting archaeological and historical content and share events from other local heritage organisations. In the social media world of 2022, a presence on twitter is almost expected for any public figure or institution, so we are excited to introduce the SAS entry to that platform. You can find the SAS account on [www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com) and type in the name as given in the heading above. It's very easy to join using your email address and password of your choice. Posts can be up to 280 characters (50-60 words on average), and one can share a combination of photos, links, videos just as on Facebook. Related to this, it enables SAS to network with and advertise our society to the official accounts of other archaeological and heritage organisations, to relevant university departments, NGOs and so forth. Twitter also offers a private messaging function which committee members could use for communication.

We hope that our presence on this platform will bring in new members, enable a wider public presence for SAS and strengthen our relationships with many of the organisations mentioned above - we are already followed on twitter by the official pages for CBA Wessex and Fishbourne Roman Palace! Where any SAS members have existing accounts on twitter we hope to engage with you and other supporters to share relevant information, resources and photos pertaining to our areas of interest.

Hopefully we will see some of you on there!

Sam Edwards

### **SAS Social Media Guidelines**

These guidelines have recently been agreed by the SAS committee, for the administration of our Facebook and twitter accounts, backed by agreed procedures for implementation.

1. **No promotions and spam**: give more to this group than you take. Self-promotion, spam and irrelevant links are not allowed: comments not related to the objectives of Southampton Archaeology Society will be taken down.
2. **Be kind and courteous**: we're all in this together to create a welcoming environment. Let's treat everyone with respect. Healthy debates are natural, but kindness is required.

3. Groups and Organisations: if someone within an unrelated Group or Organisation is interested in our pages, please request membership on your personal fb page, or it may be blocked.
4. Discrimination: we will not accept postings which discriminate against any individual or group.
5. Unlawful behaviour: we do not accept postings which appear to report or advocate unlawful actions by any person or any cause they are associated with.
6. Southampton Archaeology Society reserves the right to take down postings which breach these rules and if necessary suspend or bar the individual concerned, for a period we shall determine.



## Notice of SAS Annual General Meeting 2022

Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> May 2022 7.30pm

St Joseph's Hall, Bugle Street, Southampton SO14 2AH

To receive reports on the activities of Southampton Archaeology Society during the past year, to approve the financial accounts and to elect the committee members for the year 2022-2023.

The formal meeting will be followed by a short break to enjoy a glass of wine and refreshments.

Dr Andy Russel will then give a talk on recent work of Southampton Archaeological Unit.

[www.southamptonarchaeology.uk](http://www.southamptonarchaeology.uk)

 Southampton Archaeology Society



@SotonArchaeoSoc

Email: [southamptonarchaeology@gmail.com](mailto:southamptonarchaeology@gmail.com)

<p>Our lectures normally take place in St. Joseph's Hall, Bugle Street SO14 2AH, 7.30pm on the 2nd Tuesday of each month, subject to restrictions as current. Refreshments are available from 7.00pm. Talks are free to paid-up SAS members, £3 to guests.</p>	<p><b><u>Subscription Rates 2021/22</u></b></p> <table> <tr> <td>Individuals</td> <td>£10.00</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Senior Citizens</td> <td>£8.00</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Juniors/Students</td> <td>£8.00</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Family</td> <td>£14.00</td> </tr> </table> <p>If you or a friend wish to join SAS (or to renew your subscription) please contact the Hon Treasurer for an application form, or visit our website to print off a copy.</p>	Individuals	£10.00	Senior Citizens	£8.00	Juniors/Students	£8.00	Family	£14.00	<p><b><u>Contact us</u></b>  <a href="http://www.southamptonarchaeology.uk">www.southamptonarchaeology.uk</a></p> <p><b>Mandy Kesby, Hon Secretary.</b>          29 Abercrombie Gardens          Lordshill SO16 8FQ  <a href="mailto:amandybutt@aol.com">amandybutt@aol.com</a>          Phone: 023 8073 5360</p> <p><b>Sue Davies, Hon Treasurer.</b>          32 Arlott Court SO15 2RZ  <a href="mailto:suedavies64@btinternet.com">suedavies64@btinternet.com</a>          Phone 023 8022 1587</p>
Individuals	£10.00									
Senior Citizens	£8.00									
Juniors/Students	£8.00									
Family	£14.00									
<p><b><u>2021-2022 SAS Committee</u></b>  <b>Chair</b> – Martyn Dowell  <b>Vice-Chair</b> – John Langran  <b>Hon Treasurer</b> – Sue Davies  <b>Hon Secretary</b> – Mandy Kesby  <b>Committee Members</b> – Rowan Bright, Chris Evans, Karen Wardley, Sarah Hanna, Matt Garner. Co-opted: Sam Edwards.          Archaeology Advisor: Dr Andy Russel.</p>										

We would love to receive contributions to the Newsletter – by email to [sarahvhanna@hotmail.com](mailto:sarahvhanna@hotmail.com), or by post to Sarah Hanna, 346 Hill Lane SO15 7PH. We reserve the right to edit as necessary.