



Southampton Archaeology Society

April 2023 Newsletter

Dear members

I hope you've enjoyed the Easter holidays in spite of mostly less than spring-like weather. The Society has had an excellent series of talks so far this year: in February with Stephen Fisher, who told us about preparations for D-Day around the English coast and especially in and around Southampton, many still visible such as widened and concrete reinforced paths on Southampton Common. Then Richard Henry spoke to us in March about the end of Roman rule in Britain and his PhD research into patterns of finds in material culture, which may help to explain the process of withdrawal. Thank you to Sue Davies for her summary of the talk, and to Martyn Dowell for his ideas on the subject: potential theories abound on this era, and this exchange may continue into the next edition. In April we welcomed Stuart Needham to talk about The People of the Heath project in Hampshire, where excavation of an early Bronze Age cremation cemetery has provided new ideas on the siting and alignment of funeral monuments on Petersfield Heath – thanks to Mandy Kesby for her reports on this talk. Reports of all these talks can be found on the SAS website www.southamptonarchaeology.uk.

Our next meeting will be the SAS 2023 Annual General Meeting on Tuesday 9th May, and members are invited to join us for the occasion when we look back over the past year, receive the audited accounts and elect a new committee. Three members of the committee are retiring, Rowan Bright, Sam Edwards and Karen Wardley and we'd like to thank them for their various contributions over the years. One member has come forward for election, and if others are interested in joining us, please contact Hon Secretary Mandy Kesby (amandybutt@aol.com) with your name and names of two members to nominate and second your nomination. Also please contact Mandy to put forward any proposals for the AGM.

We'd like to remind you that at last year's AGM a rise in subscription rates was agreed, and the new rates from 1st May will be: Adult - £12; Senior - £10; F/T Student & U18 - £10; Family - £16. If you pay by Standing Order please inform your bank of the new rate as soon as possible, and a Standing Order form is enclosed for anyone who'd like to pay in this way. For those wishing to renew their membership by cash or cheque a membership application form is also enclosed; and it includes instructions if you'd prefer to pay by Bank Transfer. Please find the Notice of this meeting enclosed/attached with the newsletter.

We look forward to our annual Study Day 2023, on **Slavery, Colonialism and Empire: a Southampton perspective** to be held on **Saturday 10th June**, 10.30am to 4.30pm. The event will be held in Southampton City Art Gallery lecture theatre and bookings are going well so far. All details for booking are given on the flyer enclosed/attached with the newsletter, or email southamptonarchaeology@gmail.com to request a booking form. We hope to see you soon!

Sarah

Honorary President of Southampton Archaeology Society

We have recently made significant progress in developing the Society's relationship with the University of Southampton. The position of Honorary President was filled by the University for many years but had lapsed, and we are pleased to announce that Professor Josh Pollard has agreed to become the Honorary President of Southampton Archaeology Society for a period of three years. Josh is most interested in later prehistory and specifically in the Neolithic, and he previously talked to the Society on **Living with Monuments: new work on the West Kennet Palisades enclosures**. As Honorary President he will give an annual Presidential

Address, taking place this year at our October meeting. Our aspiration is to deepen ties between the Society and the University with a view to some joint projects and common activities in coming years, and we are already beginning to explore opportunities with Josh and his colleagues.

John Langran

Fractured Britannia- material culture and the end of Roman Britain

Speaker: Richard Henry, Curator of Archaeology Southampton City Council & part time PhD student, Reading University

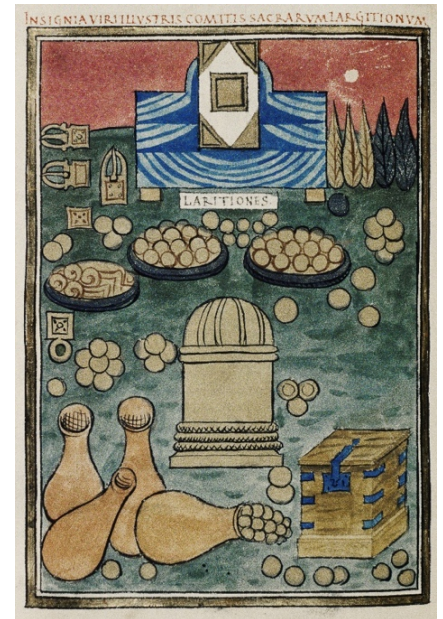
Introduction:

Richard is researching the end of Roman rule in Britain, looking at administrative and military structures, taxation, towns and material culture. What could material culture tell us about the end of Roman Britain?

Military and Civilian structures:

The *Notitia Dignitatum* is a key source, providing details of the upper levels of the army and administration at the turn of the 5th century AD. There were three Army Commands and four or five provinces. The key administrative roles were the *Count of Sacred Largesses*, two *Rationales*, who dealt with tax and the imperial estates, a Treasury and a state-run *fabrica* producing woollen goods. Britannia was supervised by the *Praetorian Prefect of the Gauls*.

Image: from Notitia Dignitatum in the Bodleian Library.



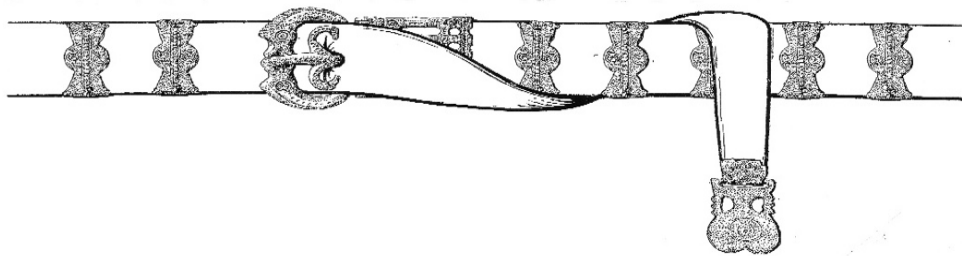
Urban centres:

Variously sized towns were classified as provincial capitals, county towns, defended small towns and small nucleated settlements. The vast majority of Britain, however, was rural.

Tax and coinage:

There were four denominations of coins. Tax was paid in kind or by coin. Copper alloy coins are found regularly across Britain and appear to have been central to tax collection. By 395AD, bronze coins had disappeared from all areas north of the Alps.

Reconstruction of a Type II Belt set (with buckle, stiffeners and strap end) - Illustration by Nick Griffiths



Material culture:

High status people were recognisable from what they wore. Military staff wore distinctive cloaks with roundels. High status military officers wore belts, and they and high status civilians wore crossbow brooches. Richard queried whether what people wore helped indicate how long the Romans retained power and if there was a transitional period. He mapped where different material items, from the end of

the 5th century, had been found across Britain, taking account of the different styles of each. He analysed five types of crossbow brooch, four main belt types, two types of spurs, and areas with high and low coin loss.

Analysis

Findings included that Type 1 crossbow brooches were found at military sites, especially Hadrian's Wall, while Type 6 were only found in the South and East Anglia. Types 3 and 4 belts appeared rarer with none found in the South West or Wales and few at Hadrian's Wall. Type C spurs were found in urban centres in the South while Type D were mainly on the East Coast. Coins continued to be well used in the South and West and in an area across to the East Coast and up to York, until usage stopped everywhere.

Richard is continuing to compare the distribution of these items to see what patterns emerge. He has found evidence of contraction southwards from Hadrian's Wall, but the analysis of spurs cut across this to some extent. There was some evidence of regional differences, which requires further work. He argued that, as coinage was not being used by 450 AD and there was an absence of other metal items among grave goods by then, Britain was no longer Roman by 450 AD.

With thanks to Sarah Hanna for use of her notes.

Sue Davies

Further thoughts on the end of Roman Britain

Richard Henry's lecture a few weeks ago was on his PhD work to clarify events at the close of Roman rule by statistical analysis of a small selection of recovered artefacts, to augment what we know of late Roman Britain from documents. Apart from questions on the viability of this method, which he himself recognises, there is the lingering question of why the Roman lifestyle as a whole disappeared apparently so quickly.

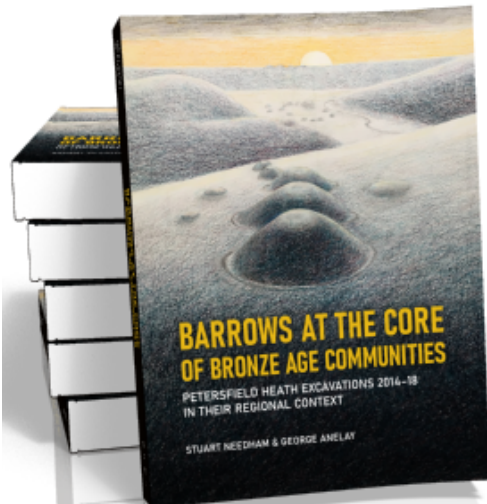
We can infer that the population across the western half of the Roman Empire had fallen considerably. That various peoples petitioned the Emperor to be admitted from across the Rhine (unsuccessfully, in general due to all too familiar racial prejudice), but later they simply invaded and settled, as did Angles and Saxons in Britain, suggests that they saw deserted land going to ruin, with few people to defend it. This is supported by Richard's findings, with few domestic items, but military items in eastern England generally. Were they vainly attempting to stop foreign settlement? An unrecorded plague has been suggested, which would mean a sudden catastrophic decline somewhere in the late C4th; but Roman writers had noted population decline in rural Italy much earlier. That had been assumed due to people going to cities for a better life, but are we being duped by the British phenomenon of the Industrial revolution? Might the population decline have been going on slowly and inexorably for many decades? If so, it could explain how the remaining population had time to move to those areas still flourishing by 400AD. Richard's data shows a strong civilian concentration in Devon and Cornwall (Dumnonia), and we know that cities began to be deserted in the C4th. Many villas continued to flourish as self-contained units, perhaps because their owners were absentees, and with little civil authority the workers overthrew the major-domo and took possession. Such buildings were often taken over as workshops.

How, then, could this have happened? The cause could have been Malaria or something similar. This disease was unknown in Europe before the Roman period, and it is assumed that the huge volume of trade that then developed had allowed a strain of mosquito to develop tolerance of colder conditions. Later on the disease rendered areas of Italy uninhabitable into the C20th. Trade may have allowed it to spread widely throughout Western Europe, to an unprotected population unaware of its cause. This would have brought about not a catastrophic extinction but an area specific decline, gradually drawing in others from different areas. Could the English fens have been a victim, for example?

While writing, I will mention a curious feature of Saxon settlement that has long puzzled me. For decades, or centuries, the incomers avoided walled towns, preferring to settle outside in so-called wics (believed to be derived from 'vicus') and other new locations. Was there some distant respect of these places built by, and therefore somehow still owned by, a previous population? By contrast, the evangelists of the Roman Church made for the old decaying fora to build their churches. Any ideas?

Martyn Dowell

The Golden Barrow of the Sun: Early Bronze age barrows, funerary practices & cosmology in the Rother Region *Lecture by Stuart Needham, from a report by Mandy Kesby.*



Petersfield Heath cemetery is part of the **People of the Heath Project** undertaken from 2014 – 18, which aims to understand and conserve the site. The location is the Rother valley where it runs into the river Arun on the western edge of the weald, with the Hampshire Hangars, high sandstone hills to the north, and lower hills and heathlands surviving along the valley. An 18th century excavation undertaken by antiquarian William Cunnington sadly left no documentation. With the help of community volunteers extensive regional surveys were carried out, and together with LIDAR surveys and HER records, a total of 550 barrows were identified, compared with 280 recognised earlier. Most are barrow mounds, with five unusual enclosure mounds. The cemetery site

has been documented for over two centuries, but by the mid-19th century six of the known barrows had been destroyed.

Radio carbon dates from excavated material show that the cemetery was in use from ~2000bc over a 200-year period, with low-level activity continuing a further 150 years before tailing away. Most of the barrows hold cremation burials within urns, but two log coffins were also discovered – of only 65 in the country. Other graves held boat-like coffins, possibly of wickerwork. Some urns contained the remains of more than one individual: one included teeth which allowed Strontium isotope testing, suggesting a 16 year old female and an elderly person. The results indicate that their diet was not from local chalklands, so they had not always lived in the immediate locality, although not far away.

Finds included prestige objects such as complete and fragmented daggers, faience beads, crafting or maintenance equipment, whetstones (including a rare perforated whetstone), and arrow heads. Most unusual was a set of pre-formed arrow head blanks, ready for finishing by an experienced knapper – was this the burial of a flint-knapper?

In some forty of the burials, mineralised organics were found, consisting of hardened mud or sand where organic material had decayed. Four urns contained residues indicating probably a basketry urn imitation, and one contained padding made from bracket fungus. One of the log coffins had an urn set above it with a sand lump on the side, possibly a rag. The material inside was dated to 100 years earlier than the organic lump, suggesting that the urn was redeposited and possibly bandaged to keep it together. Another urn was strapped together with sherds from a different urn, perhaps indicating a wish to be near to ancestors: remains might be taken from their original site and re-buried elsewhere. The enclosure barrows are more monumental and less well-known than mound barrows, and possibly constructed for “special” or elite

individuals. Local differences seem to indicate that there were several communities using the Rother valley cemetery, suggesting different cultural origins.

It was recognised that there were several alignments of monuments with the summer solstice, and others aligned with mid-winter sunrise. Petersfield Heath cemetery is well-placed for communication links along the river and land routes. Every barrow identified here has a view of the marshes, which may have had sacred implications. There are a number of significant alignments in the region that go beyond the barrows, with further links to surrounding field systems.

The book by Stuart Needham & George Analey, published by Sidestone Press is available to purchase in digital form @£20, or to read online for free. The book was nominated as Book of the Year 2023 in Current Archaeology Awards.

Activities of SAS Graffiti Team

It's been a generally quiet time for the team over the winter, although Karen Wardley and Matt Garner have recorded examples of graffiti in several cellars beneath houses in Bugle Street, Southampton by kind permission of the owners. Their report is available on the SAS website www.southamptonarchaeology.uk.

Some members of the team visited Millbrook Church in February to record examples of WW2 graffiti in the tower, and a second visit is planned in early May to complete this survey. On Saturday 20th May Frank Green will be leading a tour of Millbrook church for the Hampshire Field Club (HFC), and will give a talk on Victorian churches in Southampton. Some places are still available – please see the flyer attached or enclosed with the newsletter. Our next outing will take place in late May, a visit to Timsbury Church with Mary and Roger Harris, to explore the church and record graffiti there.

Sarah Hanna

www.southamptonarchaeology.uk

 Southampton Archaeology Society



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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 Covid restrictions as current. Refreshments are available from 7.00pm. Talks are free to paid-up SAS members, £3 to guests.

2022-2023 SAS Committee

Chair – John Langran

Vice-Chair – Martyn Dowell

Hon Treasurer – Sue Davies

Hon Secretary – Mandy Kesby

Committee Members – Rowan Bright, Karen Wardley, Sarah Hanna, Matt Garner, Sam Edwards, James Brown. Archaeology

Advisor: Dr Andy Russel.

Subscription Rates 2023/24

Individuals £12.00

Senior Citizens £10.00

Juniors/Students £10.00

Family £16.00

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.

Contact us

www.southamptonarchaeology.uk

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