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Yatton Congresbury Claverham and Cleeve Archaeological Research Team

Newsletter December 2023

Chairman's chat

Many of articles in this issue relate to members' travels over the summer. Surprisingly all these places are in southern England, so not too far if you wish to visit. During the last month the weather has not been kind with rain and the resulting waterlogged fields. Consequently, surveys have been postponed. As soon as the weather improves and the fields are drier we hope to resume our survey work at Westbury-sub-Mendip. If we can complete this work and do some analysis before their 'digging' season starts, it may give them some possible areas, away from the main excavation, to target with test pits. It has been a privilege contribute something to the story of this site. to May I wish you all a merry Christmas and healthy and drier New Year. Arthur

Branding Roman Villa, Isle of Wight

This archaeological site is a few miles along the coast from Sandown and situated close to the Bembridge Estuary. For those living here, this location was a perfect choice. It enabled the freedom to communicate with and travel to local Island settlements, mainland Britain and cross the Channel to Gaul.

Fertile arable lands around the Villa complex allowed good crops of grain to be grown. Sheep and cattle could fertilise the land between seasons and springs nearby gave a good water supply.

The museum preserves the West Range, built around AD300, which is the last and grandest of three buildings on the site and houses some exceptional mosaic floors. Dating from the 3rd and 4th century AD they not only tell the stories of Roman gods and goddesses but also incorporate some unusual features seen nowhere else in the British Isles.



The Cock-Headed man is part of the Bacchus mosaic and depicts a most peculiar image whose origins are uncertain. It's suggested that the image may be poking fun at the Emperor Constantius Gallus as in Latin gallus translates as cockerel.



Another unique panel, which is part of the Medusa mosaic, is that of the Astronomer. Here we see him surrounded by some of the tools of his trade i.e. the sundial raised up on its plinth and a terrestrial sphere.

The villa's website has a link to a virtual CGI tour of the site which is well worth watching. It not only takes you through the re-imagined rooms but also places the villa within the landscape. When I saw how close it was to the estuary and all that that meant for ease of trade etc. I was reminded of Wemberham Villa and its proximity to navigable water.

Janet Dickson

Roman Bath-houses on Hadrian's Wall



The changing rooms at Chesters



Not all baths on Hadrian's Wall are Roman!!



The latrines at Vindolanda



Excavating an enormous bath-house in Carlisle

Janet Dickson

Earliest evidence of 'the plague' in Somerset

A finding from the Mendips has helped to push back the date of the earliest known plague in Britain from 541 CE (the plague of Justinian) to about 4000 BP.

The black death (or bubonic plague), caused by the bacterium *Yersinia pestis* and spread by fleas, devastated the European population in the 14th century. However, Swali *et al*, (2023), looked at DNA in the teeth of 2 skeletons from a natural pit at Charterhouse Warren farm (where at least 40 men women and children were buried) and one skeleton from Levens Park ring cairn, near Kendal in Cumbria. Unexpectedly they found evidence for plague bacteria. Unexpectedly, because the 'plague' leaves no traces in the skeleton. The *Y. pestis* DNA was recovered from a woman aged 35 to 45 years from the Cumbrian site, and two children, 10 to 12 years old, from Somerset. Both sites were radiocarbon dated to the Bronze age, about 4000 BP.

However, the *Y. pestis* they identified lacked 2 genes of the later strains, *yapC* and *ymt*, the latter playing a role in the spread by fleas. The distance between the 2 sites suggests the organism may have been widespread, but its' extent, and how it may have spread, is unknown.

However, there is a darker side to this tale; the authors aren't sure how this new evidence fits into what happened at Charterhouse and whether or not there may be some connection between the disease 'and the violence' related to the burials. Sorry, I forgot to mention that the bodies were 'dismembered'; apparently this aspect is 'work in progress'!

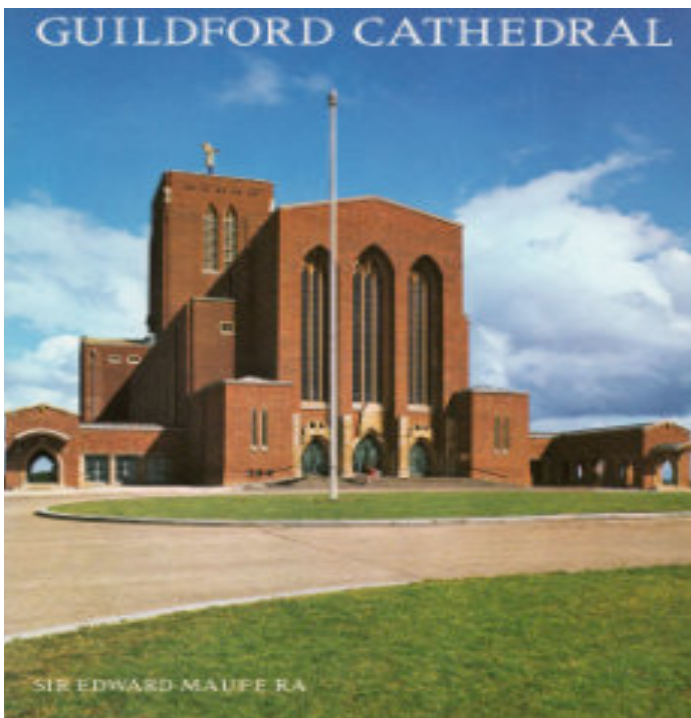
Ref: Nature publications (2023); <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-023-38393-w>

Geoff Pearson: Modified from Ian Sample, *The Guardian*, May 31st, 2023.

Geoff Pearson

CDAS TOUR 2023 Guildford Cathedral: August 16

We had a guided tour of Guildford Cathedral in two groups. Our guide was a delightful lady called Fanny who had been PA to two archdeacons and who had a comprehensive knowledge of the division of the very large Winchester Diocese into three in 1927. The diocese of Guildford was created in 1927. One of the churches in the town, Holy Trinity was used as a Pro Cathedral but soon found to be too small. It was decided to build a new cathedral on Stag Hill (then in open country) to the North of the town. Money to purchase the land had come from Canadian donors in gratitude for the kindness shown by locals to the Canadian troops stationed in the area. The architect was Edward Maufe, who won a competition of 183 architects for the most functional design of all English cathedrals as the vestries, sacristy and chapels were placed in the side aisles allowing a clear view of the altar from the west end.

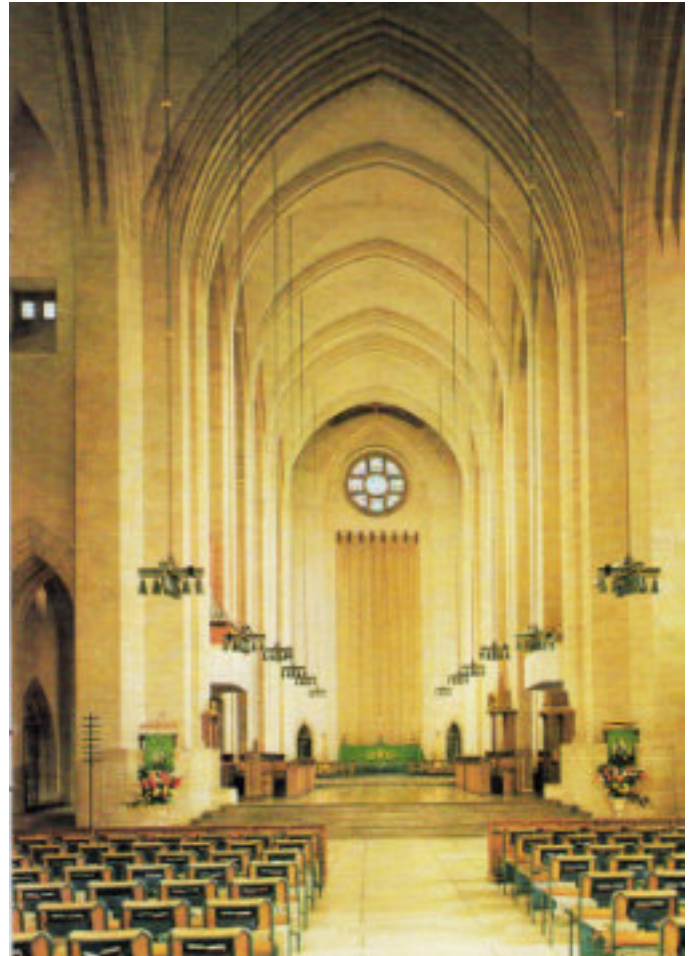


Work started in 1936 using bricks made of clay excavated on the site. Work was halted by WWII and still further by material shortages after the war, as housing was seen as the priority. Our leader on the study tour remembered "Work restarted in 1956 funded partly by the "Buy a Brick" campaign. The cost was 2/6 (12.5pence) and the donor (including me on a visit with my mother's Mothers Union group in about 1959!) signed the brick. Bricks given by royalty are displayed in the St Ursula Porch". The post war bricks came from a different company, hence the change of colour. The cathedral was finally consecrated in 1961.

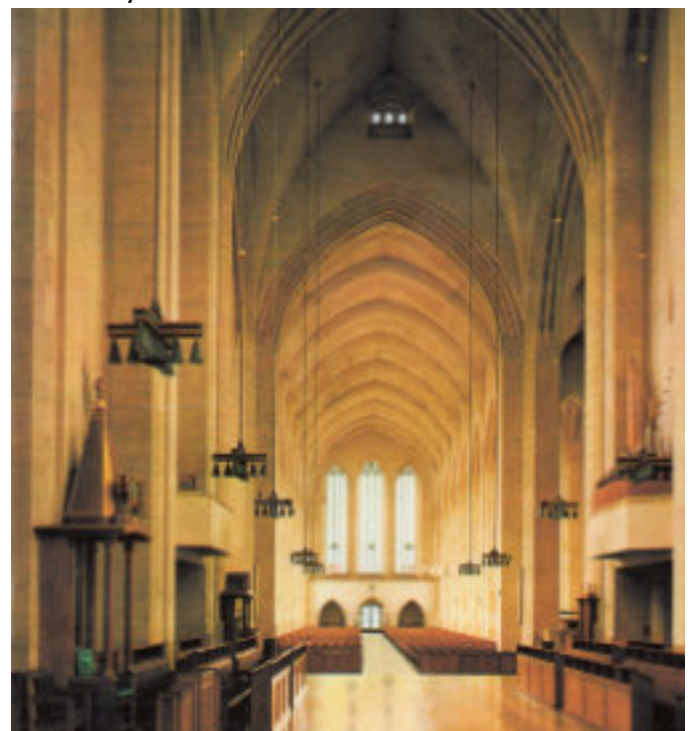
The cloisters or garths at the west end of the cathedral provide the north to south arms of a cross

On approaching the cathedral, we were a bit disappointed by its rather severe brick façade made from the clay of

Stag Hill on which the cathedral stands but relieving the austere effect on the tower is the fifteen-foot golden angel which turns with the wind. (photo 1) Once inside we could admire the facing of cream Douling limestone which contributed to the lightness of the interior particularly in the chancel.



Sadly although the vaulting was made of reinforced concrete with a copper covering to exclude the need for wood which would have posed a fire risk, the roof has already had to have remedial work.



The cathedral can seat 1600 people. The kneelers are divided diagonally with blue to represent the hill and white the sky with various designs added.

On the north of the crossing is the chapel of the Royal Surrey regiment with its wrought iron gates and on the south the children's chapel.

The Baptistry is in the far south west corner but is seldom used as baptisms now take place at the chancel steps.

On the south side there are two entrances, the larger one appeared to be being used as a furniture store. It

was envisaged that the congregation would enter the cathedral from the south having climbed numerous steps from the town. It now appears that most visitors drive up to the west front and use the car park on the north so the porch is redundant. (photo 3)

Outside the glass doors at the west end are engraved and the south ones are of bronze. Also there are numerous statues.

An excellent sandwich lunch in the Topsy Café rounded off our visit.

Marianne Pitman

Crofton Pumping Station

The Kennett and Avon Canal is a combination of three waterways.

- The river Kennet from Reading to Newbury.
- The river Avon from Bristol to Bath.
- And 57 miles of man made waterway linking Newbury to Bath.



The summit level of the canal, which runs from Crofton and Burbage, is 450feet (140 m.) above sea level and 410feet (12 m.) higher than a reliable local water source. Hence the need for a pumping station, this was sited at Crofton because of the availability of fresh water springs in the area. It was built in 1807 and started work in 1809 with one engine. A second engine was installed in 1812 and is still in operation today.



A Boulton and Watt engine was bought second hand from The East India Co. and arrived and installed in 1807. The engine house was designed to house two engines and a second Boulton and Watt engine was ordered in 1810 and at work by 1812. Steam was supplied by three "waggon" boilers. The chimney was a rectangular brick structure attached to the end wall. In 1841 the Great Western Railway opened between London and Bristol which forced the canal co. to improve efficiency, so in 1843 the "waggon" boilers were replaced by three Cornish boilers.



At this time the 1809 engine was replaced with a Sims Patent Combined Cylinders engine. In 1852 ownership of the pumping station passed to G.W.R. In 1856 it became necessary to replace the chimney, a new brick one was built.



Both engines were in regular service until 1952. By this time the canal was virtually closed but it was necessary to maintain the water level in the Summit Pound as the railway was dependent upon it to top up the locomotives tanks. In 1812 the Boulton and Paul engine remained “in steam” for this purpose as late as 1959 when, due to deterioration, the top 31ft (11m) of the chimney were removed. This caused smoke to pour out of the boiler house and fires would not draw so the engines were finally retired.



British waterways continued to raise water with a diesel pump replaced by permanent electric pumps. Although the engines had been preserved in good condition they remained in their retired state until 1968 when restoration took place.

My visit coincided with the beam engines in full steam due to the electric pump breaking down, both pumps were working and a volunteer said this was only the third time in thirty years that had happened.

Dave Long

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY 2024 Jan-June

Thursday January 11th – YCCART Review Day 10.00-1.00pm.

We have invited Andrew Buchanan, site director of the Westbury-Sub-Mendip excavation, to talk about the work done over the past few years and to share some of the amazing artefacts which they have found. This will be followed by a fish & chip lunch for those who wish to stay on.

All other coffee meetings as per usual - 1st Thursday of the month.

Thursday May 2nd provisionally booked for YCCART AGM 10.00-1.00pm

Facing the waters: Woodspring bay and coastal change

Smugglers, eh?: we have all been shown a cave or 'secret tunnel' where barrels of brandy are supposed to have been hidden by smugglers: the overly romantic view we have of these gangs of (usually) rural, desperate and violent men belie the real story behind this: referring to them as 'the gentlemen' was a contemporary attempt (in Romney Marsh) to whiten the whole business.

*'Brandy for the parson, baccy for the clerk...
Watch the wall my darling, while the gentlemen go by'*

But the smugglers, in trying to reach safe haven in places like Woodspring Pill, ran the danger of the Bristol Channel's terrifyingly difficult waters, without the professional help of the pilots from Pill: that group of men's whole living was based on intimate knowledge of the banks and obstructions of the Channel, and the helping of sea-going vessels up the treacherous waters to the international port of Bristol.

The enormous tidal range in the Channel today frequently uncovers 'sands', banks usually only covered by a few feet (or for areas revealed at lowest tides) a few metres of water (and usually having the same, rather unlikely, folklore about a cricket match once being played on them) (Fig 1).



Fig 1: Uncovered by lower tides, the Langford Grounds are a sandbank solid enough to walk on, seen from Sand Point at the southern end of Woodspring Bay: Clevedon (background) is at the northern end.

This all stems back to recovery of water levels in the world's seas since the ice suddenly began to melt some 16000 years ago. Before this, the Severn was a river running through a deep valley some 100-120m below the current sea level, a world of ice and tundra where long rocky valley slopes led down to the proto-Severn from the base of Mendip or the hills around the Gwent Levels.

The rising sea and the rapid laying down of alluvium from rivers and sea built up the Northmarsh, the Gwent Levels and the Somerset Levels over a geological eyeblink of time.

These changes are still happening: because we are a technological civilisation makes no difference to the long slow grind of geology (well, not yet). After the Romans, natural climate change meant that the sea 'came back' in many areas around the Channel, so much Roman landscape was buried under a few centimetres to several metres depth.

Boats heading up the Bristol Channel were eternally in danger of wreck from unseen hazards to navigation (there are literally hundreds of both in the Channel), and needed to be guided by the pilots (Fig 2)



Fig 2: Two rowed pilot boats guide a large vessel to the north of Sand Point, on this Pigott painting of 1768.

Similar effects were felt by the coasts, particularly around Woodspring Bay, in Clevedon, Kingston Seymour and Wick St Lawrence. The coast feels so stable today, with its enormous late 20th century concrete defences, but in truth, it has varied tremendously as natural climate variation has made itself known: sometimes dramatically, like the great storms and floods of 1606 (which Steve Rippon has shown incidentally, was almost certainly not the result of a tsunami). Sometimes though, slowly, where the alluvium ('mud') is often stable enough to provide us with a rich harvest of the salty crunchy goodness that is samphire in season in June and July).



Fig 3: Black Rock living up to its name, a rocky outcrop once dry land, immediately south of Clevedon Pill. Some soils with Mesolithic flint survived here into the 20th century.

near Clevedon Pill, or Roman pottery among the aircraft cannon shells in the rocks around the 20th century target vessels wrecked in Woodspring Bay: these were once dry land. (Fig 3; Fig 4)



Fig 4: The wreck of a target vessel in Woodspring Bay, sitting on a spread of rock at very low tide, where both armour-piercing shells and Roma pottery can be found scattered.

But it wasn't all one-way: it is clear that old sea banks now lie inland in all three parishes, surviving only as low earthen banks or even as linear stretches of ditch parallel to the modern coast.

With modern warnings about global warming, we ought to be all aware of the temporary, shifting nature of our coasts, which seem so strong and permanent in our lives. Huge technical effort can reverse this (as the construction of the miles of promenade did in Weston-super-Mare in the late 19th century), but it isn't easy or cheap: geology and climate are unceasing, grindingly slow and remorseless: the whole thing is reflected clearly in the archaeology and history of our very own Woodspring Bay.

Vince