
SOCIETY NEWS



THE BULLETIN OF THE ENFIELD ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

SEPTEMBER 1981

NO 82

BRECON HOUSE, listed as a Grade II Building, in Gentlemans Row Enfield, has stood empty and neglected for far too long. This mid-18th century building is important to Enfield and to the total environment of the area in which it stands.

A planning application to convert the house into flats and erect houses in the grounds has been rejected by the Council. No doubt there will be an appeal which will then have to be considered by the appropriate committee. During the time that must elapse before a decision is made, the house will be even more damaged by vandals. Already, slates have been removed from large areas of the roof, the windows have gone and there have been two fires inside the house. The interior of the coach-house has been wrecked and the garden wall is being demolished. As Audrey Robinson said in the March bulletin, demolition by neglect is taking place. A wire mesh fence has been put up at the back of the house but this presents no real problems of access and entry to the house appears to be easy.

Radical changes in the law are needed to speed up planning procedures by local authorities and to provide them with sufficient legislation to protect such places as Brecon House. Most councils are reluctant to use their existing powers as this can result in the expenditure of large sums of public money. What is the point in governments passing planning laws when the constraints of financial consideration render local authorities impotent to enforce these laws?

Unless something is done very soon the house will have deteriorated to such an extent that demolition will become inevitable and another part of Enfield's heritage will be lost. Photographs have been taken for our collection but we hope that a few prints and colour slides will not soon be the only surviving traces of this building.

EXCAVATION AT MAIN AVENUE
BUSH HILL PARK

Ever since the Society's well
publicised and highly successful
excavation at Lincoln Road in 1975

we have been seeking the opportunity to continue excavations in adjoining areas and we were therefore glad to be given the opportunity to examine areas of the grounds of Bush Hill Park School (Main Avenue) during the school summer vacation. In mid July a team of enthusiastic volunteers under the command of Les Whitmore dug seven small trial trenches and one three metre trench in an attempt to trace the Roman occupation levels. found some one hundred yards away on the Lincoln Road site. Unfortunately it appears that modern disturbance has affected the area to a depth of at least one metre and the trenches produced no more than a few scattered sherds of Roman pottery. It is quite conceivable that a major excavation to a greater depth would have revealed Roman or medieval levels but in view of the need to complete excavations during August, such involvement would not be possible. It is hoped that trial trenches will be dug in areas nearer still to the Lincoln Road site before time runs out, in which case a further report will appear in a later bulletin.

John C Stevens

NEW MEMBERS

A warm welcome is extended to the following new members:

Mrs K Delahay 411D Hertford Road London N9

Miss T J Coben 12 Cranbrook Road Wood Green London N22 5NA

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

All meetings will be held in Millfield House Arts Centre,
Silver Street Edmonton N18 at 8.00 pm.

16 September Wednesday

PAST WORK OF THE SOCIETY
John Ivens and Geoffrey Gilliam

The Society was formed in the Autumn of 1955 and 'went public' in February 1956. Since then a great deal of fieldwork and research and a lot of excavations have been carried out. The first site to be excavated was the earthwork at Bush Hill and was followed in 1957 by the first serious attempt to locate and section the Roman Road, Ermine Street, in this area. There have been many other attempts to find the road, some successful, others less so. In 1974-76 the Society organised the excavation of an important Roman site in Lincoln Road when that part of Enfield was being redeveloped. Other research has included such diverse subjects as Enfield Chase, Prehistoric Enfield, Industrial Archaeology, Medieval Homestead Moats in Hertfordshire and Enfield At War 1914-18 and 1939-45.

The story of how the Society came to be formed and its subsequent history and activities (some serious, others humorous) will be told at this meeting.

14 October Wednesday

FILM SHOW

THE BEGINNING OF HISTORY This film describes life in prehistoric Britain from the Old Stone Age to the Iron Age. It will show agricultural methods, burial customs and many aspects of everyday life in the periods concerned. The sites shown will include the massive stone circle at Avebury and the reconstruction of the Iron Age farm at Little Woodbury.

CAVE DWELLERS OF THE STONE AGE How remains of ancient people - skeletons, weapons, tools, paintings - have helped archaeologists to gain a realistic impression of their way of life. The film depicts in dramatised form the lives of two early ancestors, Neanderthal Man (over 50,000 years ago) and Cro-Magnon Man (25,000 years ago). It was produced in the Dordogne region of south-western France, where extensive relics of ancient cultures have been discovered.

SLOVAK ANTIQUITIES This film shows some of the archaeological discoveries of early man in Czechoslovakia. It includes examples of sculpture 27,000 years old and remains of Neolithic settlements.

11 November Wednesday

CELTIC ART
G Marsh

Apart from their hilltop fortresses, a tangible reminder of the Celts is their art, much of which survives for us to look at and to marvel at today.

The craftsman occupied a special place in Celtic Society, only fractionally below that of a warrior. He was master in most materials but he excelled in metal and his work was always in demand. Some fine examples are illustrated in the British Museum publications book 'Early Celtic Masterpieces from Britain in the British Museum' by John Brailsford.

Remaining submerged during the Roman occupation, Celtic art was to re-emerge in post-Roman times to influence, amongst other things, the beautifully illuminated scripts in the early Christian monasteries of which the Book of Kells and the Lindisfarne Gospels are two examples.

LECTURE REPORTS

EXCAVATION AND RECONSTRUCTION OF HOLY TRINITY PRIORY ALDGATE

On Wednesday 22 April, John Schofield took us back more than 400 years to recreate

the buildings and courtyards of Holy Trinity Priory, the remains of which are buried beneath the roads and buildings at Aldgate in an area of London rapidly changing as the work of redevelopment proceeds.

The priory of Augustinian monks was founded there in 1108 by Matilda, wife of Henry II, and it was extended and added to over the centuries.

In 1532 Henry VIII ordered the monastery to be dissolved. This was done as a sort of trial run before the order of 1538 was made closing down all monasteries in the land.

HTP was acquired by one of the King's favourites and he immediately sold all the land from the site. He also removed the roof and end walls of the huge church and laid a road through the nave, a road which survives to this day as Mitre Street. Each side of the church was then converted into houses, as were most of the other buildings.

At the corner of Mitre Street stands the remains of an arch built in about 1300 and is the only part of the monastery surviving above ground.

Much of the evidence for the layout of the site comes from a plan drawn by John Symons in 1592, and from the plans attached to deeds for the houses subsequently built there.

Some excavation has been carried out but this has been determined by the location and pace of redevelopment and digging often had to be done under extreme conditions during the winter months.

A useful aid to the lecture was the Xerox copy of the plan of the site handed to each member present which enabled them to see at a glance the layout of the buildings and to follow the speaker as he explained the excavation and research.

The Prior's house and other buildings were traced and several burials were uncovered. Because of their mutilation by foundation trenches for subsequent buildings, which had removed either the upper or lower parts of the skeleton, they were given various names by the excavators such as "Head and Shoulders" and "Legs and Co" !

The monks had their own gateway out through the nearby city wall and this was recently discovered during another excavation. It was a unique feature unparalleled elsewhere on the wall. By showing pictures of surviving gateways, churches, belfries, etc from other sites, John Schofield was able to illustrate for us what HTP looked like in its heyday. It must have been very impressive and, like so many monastic sites, the layout influenced the medieval planners in their ideas of what form towns should take.

John Schofield ended by showing slides of Westminster Palace with drawn reconstructions of the area in medieval times and photographs of the same views today.

A well-told and fascinating story.

LEATHER WORKING IN ROMAN TIMES On Wednesday 20 May we spent a pleasant evening at Millfield House in the company of our President. Dr Anthony's chosen subject for the 1981 Presidential Address was 'Leather Working in Roman Times' and she began by describing the many uses for the large quantities of leather required to meet the demands of the military as well as the needs of the domestic market.

Evidence for the use of the material comes from Roman literature as well as contemporary sculpture; Julius Caesar in his Gallic Wars refers to leather sails on ships, and some of the scenes on Trojans Column depict the leather tents used by the army. A lot of leather would be required to make the number of sails needed by the Roman navy and for commercial shipping. But even more was necessary for the army where each centurion had his own tent, which measured about 20 feet by 15 feet, and a tent, 14 feet by 10 feet, would be required for every eight men; which adds up to a lot of tents for each legion. The large areas of leather required for sails and for tents could only be achieved by sewing together several hides, using bronze or, more likely iron, needles. Because of the need to ensure they were waterproof, an oil-tanning process was used. Leather was also needed to make saddles, harness, belts and items of uniform as well as the thick-soled sandals required by the soldiers. The soles of the sandals were made up of two or three layers of ox-hide and the uppers of sheepskin or goatskin. A supply of shoes, slippers, belts, clothing, beds, bedding, cushions, buckets, etc would be required in large quantities for

the domestic market. Most of the goods were made from leather prepared with a vegetable tannin.

Time has not been kind to Roman leather and it is only on a few sites that conditions are favourable for its preservation. The wet conditions at Vindolanda helped preserve otherwise perishable items and we were shown several items of leather recovered during recent excavations there.

About 50 shoes, both for men and for women, all richly decorated, were found at Mediobogdum, Hardknott, Cumbria. Amongst the other items was part of what is believed to be a shield cover; as well as using leather in the construction of the shield, the Romans appear to have provided a protective cover.

Other slides showed the use of leather for cushions, and reference was made to other examples in Joan Liversidge's book "Roman Furniture".

No complete Roman tannery has yet been excavated but several pits associated with the industry have been found from time to time.

Because of their offensive smell, tanneries, in common with most industries, were required to be built outside Roman towns.

Traders often formed themselves into guilds, partly religious, partly social, partly based on business interests. One of their functions was to ensure decent burial for their members. Although firm evidence is lacking at present, it is possible that leather workers' guilds did exist in Roman times.

Little is known about the details of tanning in Roman times but it probably varied very little from the medieval and later methods. To illustrate how this was done, Dr Anthony showed slides of a tannery which had been moved from its original site in Central Wales and re-erected in St Fagans Folk Museum near Cardiff, and explained the tanning process.

The hides were received and cleaned of fat, which together with the bones were used to make glue. They were then placed in lime pits to remove the hair. This, too, had a further use as it was sold to plasterers to provide a binding agent for plaster (nothing was wasted!). Having been cleaned, the hides were then hung from poles and immersed in vegetable tannin. After going through other treatments the leather was then ready for use.

We were shown the knives and other tools used to cut and shape the leather for each particular purpose with an explanation of their various uses.

An interesting and informative lecture.

Ian Jones kindly brought along some Roman shoes recently recovered during the excavation of a Roman well at Harlow.

LOOKING AT OLD HOUSES

There was a packed meeting on Wednesday 17 June to listen to Adrian Gibson give his lecture on 'Looking at Old Houses'. That he was a master of his subject was shown during the hour and a half when he took us on a tour of Essex and Hertfordshire to look at some of the interesting old houses in such places as Wendons Ambe, Little Hornead, White Rodings and elsewhere.

We began at Tiptofts, a house in Saffron Walden which presents a solid Victorian brick front to the casual viewer. There are, however, certain features which suggest an earlier origin for the house; an odd gable end, the chimney stack not being placed centrally over the ridge line of the roof and so on. A look at the back revealed even more disorder in the construction of the house and once inside the reason became clear. Tiptofts was a medieval timber-framed hall with its base resting on chalk and flint foundations. It had a hammer beam roof and also incorporated crown and post technique in its construction.

The next place to be visited was The Bury, a house in Claverings, near Bishops Stortford. Again, the external appearance of the house belied its early history. It looks 17th century, and is so listed by the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, but a glance inside shows the original timbers where straight braces, the use of notched lap joints, etc indicate a 13th century date.

The speaker reminded us that the accepted dates for many (if not all) houses listed by the RCHM have been called into question and on re-examination found to be much too high. Many houses once considered to be of 15th century date (largely it seems because no-one believed that earlier structures could survive!) are now being given dates in the 13th century and sometimes in the 12th century. This late awareness is even more surprising when one considers that Greenstead Church, built of timber, was known to be standing there in 1013.

Harlowbury, in Old Harlow, looks 18th century in date, even the interior of the house, now modernised and divided into separate units, gives little away, but a climb into the roof space reveals that it, too, was in origin a medieval aisled hall, for in the roof space are the soot encrusted timbers from the period when open fires were burning in the hall below.

Some of the smaller houses were also illustrated, which although lesser in scale still exhibit all the features of their larger counterparts; the hall with a doorway and cross entry at one end and the solar and other rooms at the other.

One interesting example was Sangers, north of Colchester, which at a casual glance appears to be artificial, a piece of whimsy from the 1920's. But again, a close look at the end walls revealed timber braces jointed in such a fashion to suggest an early date. A trip inside confirmed this belief when the house turned out to be 13th century in date.

The first attempts to control the smoke from open fires was made by fitting a louvre into the roof and although very few survive today, the shape of the roof timbers often indicate where it had been placed. At first they were fairly simple in construction and one can be seen in Gainsborough Old Hall, Lincolnshire. It had become unstable and was therefore removed and placed on view inside the house. More complicated versions were later built. An interesting example of a louvred chimney made of pottery was shown to us. Few of these survive but many must have once existed.

A house at Chrishall of seemingly 17th or 18th century date was being altered at one end when it was found that the chimney, a later insertion, was resting on the original open hearth. The early hearth was of pitched tiles on which the fire was placed. An excavation there revealed 16th century pottery and this date agreed with the constructional characteristics of the house itself. When chimneys came to be inserted they were at first timber frames covered with wattle and daub. Later on these wooden chimneys were, wholly or partly, infilled or replaced with brick. A house at Little Hormead has a timber hood in the upper part of the building, although this is now supported on an inserted brick chimney base. At Langley Green is a cottage which has managed to retain its original timber chimney hood quite untouched.

Windows in early houses were normally covered with sliding wooden shutters. Most have long since disappeared but evidence of shutter grooves can still be seen in some houses. Saffron Walden Museum has some good examples of medieval window shutters.

A feature of timber-framed houses which has been something of a mystery were the tenon holes in the studs (upright timbers) of the cross passage wall which usually occur about 18 inches from the ground. The Speaker has been able to show that they were holes for fixing high end wooden benches similar to those only previously known in Wales.

One of the most interesting houses described to us was 2 West Street, Ware in Hertfordshire. Here a 13th century timber framed building, built between 1260 and 1280 with later additions, has been carefully restored. While restoration work was in progress, Clive Partridge carried out a small excavation in an attempt to locate the site of the original open hearth. Not only did he find the hearth but a nearby rubbish pit yielded a Saxon coin and elsewhere below the house have been found Roman remains overlying evidence of Iron Age occupation on the site! The surviving building, which is quite small, is considered to be the kitchen of a much larger building to which it was attached.

Adrian Gibson's talk gave us all a greater understanding of old houses and the sort of features we should look for. We could only admire his technical knowledge and skills and the enthusiasm with which he dealt with his subject. We are most grateful to him for sharing that knowledge and enthusiasm with us during a most interesting and enjoyable evening.

G.R.G.

AIR RAID SHELTER ARNOS SCHOOL
WILMER WAY SOUTHGATE

John Stevens recently drew my attention to a communal type air raid shelter in the grounds of Arnos School, Wilmer Way, Southgate. Permission having been obtained we went along to explore the structure. What survives is an earth mound covering a concrete shelter about 62 feet long. The walls, floor and ceiling are all of concrete which, from the evidence of the marks left by the shuttering, was cast on site. Inside, it is 6 feet 6 inches high and 4 feet 9 inches wide. Access is gained by steps leading down to entrances at each end set at right angles to the shelter. It is assumed that it was originally lit by electricity but no traces of wiring or switches could be found. In fact, no internal fittings of any sort remain.

One entrance has been boarded up and the other is strewn with rubbish dumped there over the years.

Parallel to this shelter is the stump of a concrete wall which also bears marks of shuttering used in its construction and suggests that a second shelter stood nearby.

The configuration of the ground also suggests that yet another shelter had been placed at right angles to the surviving one but no trace of an entrance could be found.

The ground falls away very steeply at this point and this, together with the building of extra classrooms on the site makes it difficult to be sure how many shelters were there.

The assistant caretaker informed us that there are still people living nearby who used the shelter during air raids. So it seems that its use was not confined to schoolchildren.

I am grateful to the Headmaster, Mr Hartington and the Education Office of the LBE for permission to look at the shelter and to the caretaker, Mr Fuller, for making access available.

Geoffrey Gillam

PS: What I would like to find in the Borough is an Anderson shelter in situ and not filled up with rubbish. Does anyone know of one?

CAST IRON The Industrial Revolution saw the use of iron on a large scale for beams and supporting columns in factory buildings and in the construction of bridges and railways etc. During the second half of the 19th century gates, railings, bollards, gas lamp standards, pillar boxes, garden seats, patent grates, signposts and many other objects were being mass-produced by the ironworks of this country. In spite of the pace of modern redevelopment, there are still many interesting examples of cast-ironwork to be seen in the Borough. In Angel Road Edmonton stands a tall banded column,

the upper part of which is fluted and it has an ornamental top decorated with swags of flowers. On the lower half of the column can be seen the wording 'Edmonton Urban District Council' and the date '1899'. It is a cast-iron sewer ventilator; a very functional piece of street furniture into which has gone a wealth of design.

At the end of the Napoleonic wars and throughout the 19th century surplus iron cannon were often used as posts to block alleyways intended for pedestrian use only. When the supply of cannon ran out posts continued to be cast in the same basic design. Along the front of the market square in Enfield Town can be seen what appear to be three cannon buried muzzle down, but a closer look will show them to be copies. There is no touch hole and at the 'muzzle' end is a square extension which was provided for burying in the ground. An interesting example of the tenacity of tradition. Two other examples can be seen at the entrance to the footpath to Fox Lane near the traffic lights at the junction of Green Lanes and Hoppers Road Palmers Green. There is also a nice cast iron post which indicates the footpath to Fox Lane.

The Borough has pillar boxes bearing the Royal Cipher for every monarch since the present postal service began. A VR pillar box stands at the junction of Village Road and London Road Enfield and there are wall boxes put up in the same reign in the wall near Salisbury House Edmonton and in the wall of Palmers Green Station. A short walk through the district will enable you to find many others. There is even one for Edward VIII which stands in Winchmore Hill Road Southgate. It is one of the very few put up in anticipation of his coronation.

Some of the older houses still have their original door knockers. A solid piece of iron, the sharp rat-tat-tat of which puts to shame the puny chromium plated objects passing themselves off as door knockers today. Mass produced maybe, but each mould had a great deal of attention given to its design particularly the amount of decoration the knocker was to carry.

Cast iron letter boxes are also worthy of consideration. There is even a society which makes a study of these objects. Coal hole and other cast iron covers are also studied and rubbings are often taken, not only for the satisfaction of the collector but sometimes for use in textile and wallpaper design.

Cast iron was also used in the construction of houses in Victorian times; there are decorated cast iron columns acting as supports for the bay windows of houses at the lower end of Church Street Edmonton.

Another necessary part of Victorian domestic architecture was the iron boot scraper. In some cases it was set in the wall of the houses, in others it stood to one side of the front step. There are still many to be seen. One splendid example stood until recently on the step of St Michaels Junior School in Sydney Road Enfield. It had remained there for over 80 years for countless children to clean their boots until it was swept away during the

recent redevelopment of the Palace Gardens area. Until the great scrap metal drive at the end of 1941, most of our parks, cemeteries, town halls and other public buildings, squares, many houses and even tombs were surrounded by the ubiquitous iron railings. The demand for scrap metal for munitions during the Second World War saw the disappearance of most of this ornamental ironwork. The local authorities were given the power to remove it and to assemble it in dumps for removal to the foundries. Stumps of iron in the stonework of the wall surrounding Edmonton Cemetery in Church Street, tombs in St Andrews Churchyard Enfield and the garden walls of innumerable Victorian and Edwardian houses throughout the district bear witness to the amount of ironwork removed. In December 1941 the Tottenham and Edmonton Herald commented that the "Iron railings around the Town Hall have been removed for making munitions and the improvement is generally admired". Not all of it disappeared. Whether because of oversight, the results of appeals or the eventual realisation that much of it was unsuitable for war purposes, some interesting pieces remain today. Cemetery and park gates survived, such as the railings and gateway to the site of Gough House at the foot of Forty Hill. Many older houses managed to keep their railings, as a walk along Gentlemans Row and Forty Hill will testify. Some of the larger houses have wooden gates into which has been set a screen of decorative cast iron; examples can be seen on the Ridgeway Enfield and elsewhere.

Railings in cast iron came into use about the reign of Queen Anne and some beautiful work surrounds St Pauls, the Senate House at Cambridge and at St Martins in the Fields. After 1830 the quality of design and execution declined and it has been said that the advent of factory-produced mass production made ornamental ironwork a triumph of mediocrity. While the comparison may be true, the wartime thinning out of railings has made us appreciate what little is left and it would be a pity if this was lost. Other iron railings of the period can be seen at St Michaels Hospital Chase Side Enfield and around the churchyard of St Andrews Enfield. The latter are topped every so often with designs cast in the shape of a miniature burial urn. The more traditional designs can be seen on the railings mounted on the low wall on the eastern boundary of the detached part of the churchyard. There are still a few tombs which have retained their railings and some interesting examples can be seen in St Andrews churchyard and in the cemetery in Cedar Road Enfield. The origin of the railed tomb appears to have been the iron mortsafe erected over a tomb to protect recent interments from body snatchers, and examples of mortsafes can still be seen in Scottish churchyards and burial grounds.

Iron railings have been put up in post-Victorian times but most are strictly functional making no concessions to our aesthetic sense. Examples are the railings in front of the telephone

exchange in Cecil Road Enfield.

There was even a cast iron public lavatory in Enfield! It stood in the corner of Tuckers Field (North Enfield Recreation Ground) until it was demolished in 1963 or 1964.

Most bridges carry an iron plate giving details of the maximum load the bridge is supposed to carry. Maidens Bridge Forty Hill Enfield once had a plate which stated that any person damaging the bridge would be transported.

Cast iron was also used for road signs, window frames, fireplaces and a host of other things.

The subject of this article would make an excellent research project for someone to explore the district to discover and record all the surviving ornamental ironwork in the London Borough of Enfield.

Geoffrey Gillam

WORKROOMS AT FORTY HALL The weight of the pottery collection stored in our workrooms at Forty Hall was causing some concern and it has therefore been removed and is now in the basement of Broomfield House. Shelves have been put up and the pottery is being sorted into its various groups before being put away in properly indexed boxes.

We are grateful to the museum authorities for permission to store the pottery in Broomfield. A word of thanks, too, to Messrs L Whitmore, C Mulvey, M Palmer, B Warren and R Dormer for giving up a Saturday afternoon to carry about half a ton of pottery down two flights of stairs at Forty Hall!

Now that the pottery has gone and John Stevens has finished painting the ceiling in the large room (thank you John), we think it is an excellent opportunity to give both rooms a thorough clean. To do this we need a squeegee type floor cleaner, floor cloths, a bucket (or even two), a soft broom, dusters and two or three people willing to use them. Any offers would be gratefully received by Geoffrey Gillam - 367 0263.

Books for our library continue to be received; Derek Radden recently donated copies of Britannia for 1975 and 1976, Reg Martin gave us 'Excavations at Clausentum, Southampton 1951-54', and Arthur Hall has given us a run of the Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries.

As soon as the rooms have been cleaned we hope that two or three members will offer to help our librarian, Susan Wright, to index the books, ephemeral publications and the many photographs we possess. (Book now by ringing 367 0263!)
