

Guernsey Museum Archaeology Group Newsletter

May 2010



As many of you will have heard by now, Bob Burns died at his home in France on 12 May. He had been seriously ill for several weeks and so to some extent it was not unexpected, but it is very sad news all the same. For those of us who started digging here in the 1970s and 1980s, Bob was the driving force behind the development of archaeology in the island. Excavations he directed, such as the Tranquesous, King's Road and the Plaiderie, really put the island on the archaeological map, and of course there were many more, not least at Castle Cornet with Ken Barton. As well as a natural skill at excavation and an extraordinary knowledge of ceramics, mostly self-taught, Bob's greatest ability was perhaps in communicating the importance of the archaeology he was doing to the public, and of course to his volunteers. I know that I personally wouldn't be doing this job today had it not been for Bob's patient and generous support over many years, and we all owe him an enormous debt – whether or not we knew him personally.

Over the next few days we will be thinking of ways in which we can commemorate Bob's contribution to the Museum and to the Archaeology Group. I strongly suspect that Bob would most have approved of going to a smoke-filled pub and drinking until falling over, but there aren't smoke-filled pubs any more, and I don't think that any of us could ever compete with the drinking, so we might have to think a bit harder on that one. When we come up with something suitable I will of course let everybody know.

My apologies for the lack of a newsletter since February. It has been very quiet on the excavation front – though things are now beginning to pick up, as I'll describe below – but this has given me, Tanya and Kit the opportunity to press ahead with various tasks in the office. It might not look like it when you come into the store, but we are slowly winning the battle of finding a home for everything that needs a home, or otherwise dealing with the accumulated 'stuff' of the last fifteen years.

Among the other behind-the-scenes activities, we ought to mention in particular the Sites and Monuments Record, which has been available online since earlier this year: the site can be found at <http://maps.digimap.gg/antiquity/>. Although several people have had an input into this over the years, the SMR wouldn't have reached this stage without Tanya's hard work, which is much appreciated. And if you find any mistakes, you can tell her ☺

Airport



At the end of March the waters finally receded enough for us to start digging again at the airport site. We have started an extension down towards the boggy valley – I am not sure how far we will get with this, but as the water table drops over the coming months I am keen to try and get a bit further down the slope. In the meantime, just to the right as you look at the picture here, we have a nice ditch which is coming up with a good amount of Bronze Age pottery and flint. Of course as usual it runs under the spoil heap, so we'll have to decide whether it's worth trying to move some of that.

Stanley House

At the start of this month we did a little bit more work at Stanley House, on King's Road. Those of you who came to the lecture I gave last November might remember that there was an intriguing stone poking out of the bottom of the section at the south end of the trench. I thought I could see a colour change around it, suggesting that it might be another grave, and so we dug an extension to test this theory. And yes, it is another grave: a very small one, almost certainly of a new-born child or a very young infant. The stone which was poking out of the section must have served as a grave-marker; at some point it fell forward over the grave, protecting the contents from the Victorian rubbish pits which had otherwise destroyed the earlier archaeology in this area.



Beneath the stone we found several grave goods: a bronze ring, another ring which I think might be in tin, a lump of iron, and three tiny pierced beads, possibly in jet. This is the first time that we've had beads like this at King's Road, and if the identification as tin is correct, it's also a first for that metal.



The grave-marker, which had fallen forwards from the south end of the grave. You can just about make out the slightly darker soil around the stone which marks the outline of the grave.



The bronze ring, as it was first exposed beneath the stone. As usual our acidic soil has been very unkind and it is in very poor condition. The ring possibly in tin was in even worse shape, and may only be identifiable from the fragments collected from the surrounding soil.

At the other end of the trench, we also made a small extension to get the north end of the grave dug last autumn. Part of the reason for doing this was that Mike Newman got a very strong signal with his metal detector, suggesting that there was another object still in the baulk. And indeed there was: another large bronze ring or bracelet, this one in relatively good condition and which came out of the ground in one piece. As usual, these objects will be taken to Dr Esther Cameron in Oxford for her expert conservation work. We will be doing some more work at Stanley House very soon, and of course I'll let you know if the opportunity arises to get involved.

Still on the subject of the Iron Age/King's Road, one of my other office jobs over the winter was to write an article about the recent work there, focusing in particular on the graves. This will be published in French, but the English version can be downloaded from <http://users.ox.ac.uk/~arch0013/afeaf.pdf> if you're interested to learn more.

The Oaks, Baubigny

We recently had the opportunity to dig some test pits on a site just north of the new St Sampson's School, where some sheltered housing is due to be built later this year. We did not anticipate much in the way of finds, and indeed the first five test-pits were devoid of features, but the sixth revealed a well-made, stone-lined drain, shown here after the removal of the capstones.



After wondering exactly where it came from and/or went to, a passing local informed Kit and Tracey – who did most of the digging – that it used to run (indeed presumably still runs) beneath the Baubigny Road, and in fact there is an almost

imperceptible gap in the tarmac at the edge of the road which marks the spot where there used to be an inlet into the drain. It's probably not very ancient, but perhaps an eighteenth or nineteenth century land drain.

Dates for your diary

The next major event is the Delancey gallery grave excavation, directed by Dr George Nash, which is scheduled for the week beginning Sunday 20 June. I'll send out further details closer to the time, but there will be opportunity for local volunteers to be involved.

Later in the same week, the *Art and Islands* conference is taking place at Castle Cornet. Rather to my surprise, I'm giving the very first paper, on the morning of Wednesday 23rd, when I'll be talking about the different Iron Ages in the Channel Islands. Later the same day, Jason will be talking about the Roman wreck, and of course there are many other speakers giving papers on a variety of island-related topics. Further information about the conference is available at www.arts.gg (click on the 'conference' tab on the right).

Barry Cunliffe will be excavating on Sark again in July. There will be a group visit to the site, probably in combination with the Société Jersiaise Archaeology Section, and it will be either on Saturday 17th or Sunday 18th July; I will let you know as soon as I have heard from Jersey which date they prefer.

Chris Scarre, and Duncan Garrow and Fraser Sturt, will both be excavating again this year, on Herm and at L'Erée respectively. That should be late August/into September and once again I will let you know the precise dates as soon as I have them.

Dave Lane has asked me to publicise another event, earlier in the summer: this is a flint-knapping weekend at Butser in Hampshire, scheduled for 7th/8th August. If anybody would like further details, please contact Dave at David.Lane@heritage.co.gg.

Finally, much closer to hand, I have perhaps foolishly decided to take part in the 'Photographers Fair' (http://www.thegallery.gg/news_parties-events_30.htm) coming up on Saturday 22 May, from 2pm – 6pm in Mill Street and Mansell Street – please come past, say hello, and even better buy a photograph or two, all very reasonably priced!

That's all for now. I'll leave you with one more photo of Bob, in typically restrained mood after a light lunch in Cherbourg, c. 1985...

See you soon,
Phil

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