STAFFORDSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGICAL & HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER September 2021

Web: www.sahs.uk.net **Issue No 138** email: sahs@sahs.uk.net

The Society's excavations of the Roman Site at Wall, Staffordshire

You've read the academic reports of our excavations at Wall; now read about what really happened there in our full and unexpurgated account! Diana Wilkes talks to Janet Young.

Interview with Mrs Diana M Wilkes about her memories of digging in Wall from 1967 to 1999. Interviewed by **Janet Young** for the Wall Local History Project on 30th August 2018

How did you start?

It was the result of a dare. When I was at teacher training college at Clacton, we had a history tutor who was a volunteer archaeologist somewhere down in Cornwall, very enthusiastic, and inspired most of his students. When I came back to Walsall I was still enthusiastic, and my mother and my sister said, 'You'll never dare go on a dig, you won't have the courage, you are too shy'. And, just to prove them wrong I went, in September 1967. And I stuck it until 1999, so 32 years.

All the time at Wall?

Most of the time was at Wall, but I also went up to Repton and dug with Professor Martin Biddle and his wife Birthe Kjolbye-Biddle, who were training students from Oxford University and from the American Earthwatch Group who sent over students, and I also joined them in St Albans for a couple of summers, so I've got experience of two Anglo-Saxon sites as well as the Romans. It was wonderful at Repton because we had an Anglo-Saxon warrior turn up. There was the battle of Repton in 873 AD and this warrior had been killed by a sword slash and his body was buried completely in a very large grave. He was a good six-footer which was very tall for a Viking. He'd got his sword by his side, He'd got a Thor's hammer around his neck and had got some sort of cloth skirt, a bit like a kilt, round his waist. I was asked to do some flotation work on that, literally floating the cloth in water to see if anything would separate, and I thought 'This is boring, there's nothing there', went away and had a coffee during the break and when I got back there were gold threads floating on top of the water. I think the remains are now down in the British Museum, boxed up, so people can study him. That was a one off find at Repton.

Excavation at Repton. Martin Biddle giving an onsite lecture at 8.30am, which everyone on the dig had to attend

So you turned up at Wall in 1967?

And I was assigned to clean a latrine pit. We were actually working at the back of Wall Hall. The site was going to be developed for a bungalow, so we'd got to carry out a rescue excavation before any building could go ahead. We got out what we thought were Roman barrack blocks and obviously you need a latrine pit to serve the soldiers and I was told to just clean it out. No help given, I wasn't told

what to do, so I just looked for a black edge as a guide to where the pit might have been. I should say that latrine pits are the things that everybody enjoys excavating because people drop things out of their pockets and don't want to put their hands down the latrine pit. I'd got very close to the bottom because I was nearly on natural sand, and half a Samian bowl turned up. Samian is really the best quality Roman pot you can have and once we had done a very quick clean on it, it'd got some form of hunting scene decoration around it and some people were able to identify it almost to the year when it was made, and this one was sent off to Guy de la Bedoyere who worked with Time Team and he identified it to about the mid-60's AD, purely by the decoration and the excavation there. We had quite a few silver coins turn up. When silver comes out of the ground it's purple from the oxidation on the outside, and most of those coins were mid-60's AD, once we'd cleaned them and sent them off for specialist reports. That area behind Wall Hall proved to go through from the Roman to the medieval and at one point we did discover a medieval horse burial. Literally, a hole had been dug and the horse had been dropped in the hole and covered over again. That was one we did not like doing, as soon as you opened the grave to the air the flesh began to rot and it stank. We managed ten minutes each sucking extra strong peppermints, but we did excavate it and we think from that from the finds that came out, it was probably medieval. We were very restricted at the top, by Wall Hall, because we had the school on one side and Wall Hall on the other and it was just a narrow window. We thought we'd hit on one corner of the barrack blocks and that was it. That was my first day there.

How many people were in your digging team?

Some days we landed with very few, probably only five or six; on a good day we had as many as twenty. If we were excavating a long narrow strip, then we did a leapfrog system. You'd have three or four at the front and another three or four behind. Once you reached the end, then you'd go back to front and start excavating again and we'd cover quite a large area in a day provided there was nothing that desperately needed recording.

Were you responsible for recording your finds?

No, we had somebody else. As soon as a find came out, we'd put it in a finds tray on the side of the excavation and then it was taken home, either by the director or one of the designated members of the team, to carefully clean in lukewarm water, we weren't allowed to use any soap. I used to use fingers when I cleaned because I could feel what was going on underneath. Obviously, metallic things we had out, like tweezers, which were sometimes made of iron or even copper or bronze you couldn't put those in water because you cause even more corrosion; those we would send off. Once dry finds were drawn and sent off for specialist reports, which were included in articles in Transactions. We had a doctor who was a radiologist, and he would take them to Dudley Road Hospital and X-ray them for us, so we could see what was underneath the corrosion, which was absolutely wonderful.

Diana, were you all volunteers?

Everyone of us were volunteers. We all belonged to the then South Staffordshire Archaeological and Historical Society. I did not join the society until I had been digging for 5 or 10 years. We were all volunteers, with varying degrees of expertise. Interest spurred us on.

Including those who oversaw proceedings; were they volunteers as well?

They were all volunteers as well.

Gosh, that's quite a commitment!

We had Jim Gould who was our first excavator in chief. He was a local teacher, I'm not sure how he gained his expertise. He took under his wing, Mick Aston from Time Team. Mick excavated a Roman road or what was supposed to be a Roman road, down by the A5, where the bypass just turns off and where bungalows are now. He vanished to University after doing 12 months at Wall. Mick finished in 1966, just before I joined. Bert Round took over from Jim Gould. Bert had worked under Jim for a long time, so he knew how the site worked. Finally. By the time I left, it was Steven Campbell-Kelly who again, had trained under Bert Round.

You started off digging out the latrine with your lucky find, I wonder if that's the bowl in our little Wall Museum?

I have never been able to recognise it there. A lot of our finds landed up in Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery so, I guess that's probably where it is now, in their vault somewhere.

Where did you excavate next?

We went down on the Roman site, the bath house site. The mansio, as we now know it, had been allotments and it was covered in black currant bushes and we were able to trace bean and pea trenches and the poles that held them up. So, we had a lot of clearing up on the site to do. We did have some manpower from Stafford Prison to help with the clearing, which was an experience. Of course, we had to have prison guards on site, so you felt like you were a prisoner as well. I know one time I went to the loo and one of the guards had realised I'd been gone too long, and he found a prisoner standing outside the loo waiting for me to come out. It was a good job somebody was on the ball, you never know what could have happened with an incident like that. We never saw that prisoner again. I don't think they could trust him to come on a day out. Once we got all the allotment material cleared out then we started to trace the walls that you see today.

Excavations at Wall c.a.1975-76.

Everything we see today, was it all underground foundations?

We knew it was there, we'd known it was there from excavations in the 1920s but the Second World War had come along, and it had been backfilled and covered, and people had temporarily forgotten

what was there, so you can imagine how much stuff built up over 30 or 40 years. Yes it was the 1960s when we started again so we'd got 40 years of backfill stuff to remove, it was a big job. 1920 also revealed a cemetery beyond the current car park towards Muckley Corner- mainly cremations. Inhumations come on in the second century AD.

What are your memories of digging at the mansio? Apart from clearing all the bushes off?

It was a lovely lot of teamwork, we had a lot of fun, we all got on with each other, we all worked hard. We were all given separate tasks to do. We knew vaguely the layout of the mansio from the 1920s excavation. We could more or less gauge where we were working. I was given the job of going down a well and excavating that. We had to have scaffolding up for that. Although it was into bedrock, it was a safety precaution. Going to the bottom of that well was pretty horrendous. I was a lot slimmer and I was the smallest member of the team anyway. It must have been 4 feet by 4 feet at the most, so it was tight. We had the sister of an excavator who would let down the bucket on a rope, I would fill it, and somebody else would pull it up. We found at the bottom a lot of lead curses, little scraps of lead which had something written on them, rolled up and thrown into the well. The idea being that the local water gods would grant the requests and unfortunately for us those were disposed of, thrown away. In the light of the lead curses (we call them curses for want of a better word) that turned up at Vindolanda, we now realise what we've actually thrown away.

Where was the well at the mansio?

You know the semi-circular feature in the middle. It wasn't very far from that, it was five or six feet away from it.

Do you think the well predated the mansio?

We thought it was part and parcel of the mansio. They'd need a freshwater supply of some sort and we know there were springs coming down off the hill, so it would be a collection point for a freshwater supply. They would also need a water supply for the baths below. That was piped in from the top of the hill; you can follow the conduit coming down underneath the hedgerow. (It was excavated for some distance.) One thing that was very emotional, we found the body of a 6-month old child, we were told was under six months. It was because the Romans believed that children under 6 months old, or had not cut their first teeth had no souls, so they would just dig a hole and bury them. This child had been put into some sort of hessian bag and buried under the foundations. Again, it was very close to that semi-circular feature. The doctor on site had identified, more or less, the age of the chid. We got virtually every bone in its body and that brought a tear to quite a few people. One of the walls was built over the body, there was no respect given to that child.

The circular feature, did you do any work around that?

Yes, I was given the job of excavating it. We had several theories, we thought at first it might have been an ornamental fountain, but we could find no water source to feed a fountain. It was then thought it might have been a garden feature and then it was eventually changed, and we decided it was possibly a seat for someone to sit on and relax. When I excavated it, there was just a layer of ash on top of the natural earth to level it up. We couldn't find any indication of what it was used for. Whether that had been excavated in the 1920s we are not sure, we could find no reports on it.

What happened to the baby bones?

There again, I think they are in Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, most of our stuff went there anyway. We also found a deer carcass, we thought it was a two headed deer at one time, turned out

it was two separate animals in the same grave and that's now sitting in my garage. I don't know what people will make of that one!

In the same grave as the baby?

No, it wasn't in the same grave, it was nearer the footpath that goes from The Butts to the church. It was close to that.

Were you involved in finding the stones that were the other way round?

Yes, I was. That was quite eerie. We thought it was a Romano-Celtic temple and the Romans had turned the stones upside down and back to front so that it would negate any religious feeling around them. I know I took one home to do a blotting paper impression of it, you couldn't make out what the writing was, and it was a case of building up layers of wet blotting paper and pressing it into the stone itself and peeling it off when dry. I think we decided it was the word Quintus or Quinti at the end. There were one or two people who wouldn't work on the site in that area. A lady called Anne Ross was asked to look at these stones and give us her impressions. And at the time she was looking at stones in her own home from another site, and she had some quite weird experiences with them her daughter had said that she'd seen a werewolf on the stairs when she was going to bed one night. Anne Ross was a very level-headed lady and she said on occasions she had gone very cold and there was something happening or alive in the house but as soon as the stones were taken out of the house these experiences disappeared and a lot of people, because of that, wouldn't go anywhere near our stones, just a dedicated few who didn't mind working on them. My husband, when I took one stone home, wouldn't have it in the house, I had to work in the garage. It obviously rubbed off on him as well. I think it was probably a Romano-Celtic temple, or the remains of one that we'd got. The blocks of stones were there to be re-used, because they were already cut. Why cut new stone when you've already got some that's there?

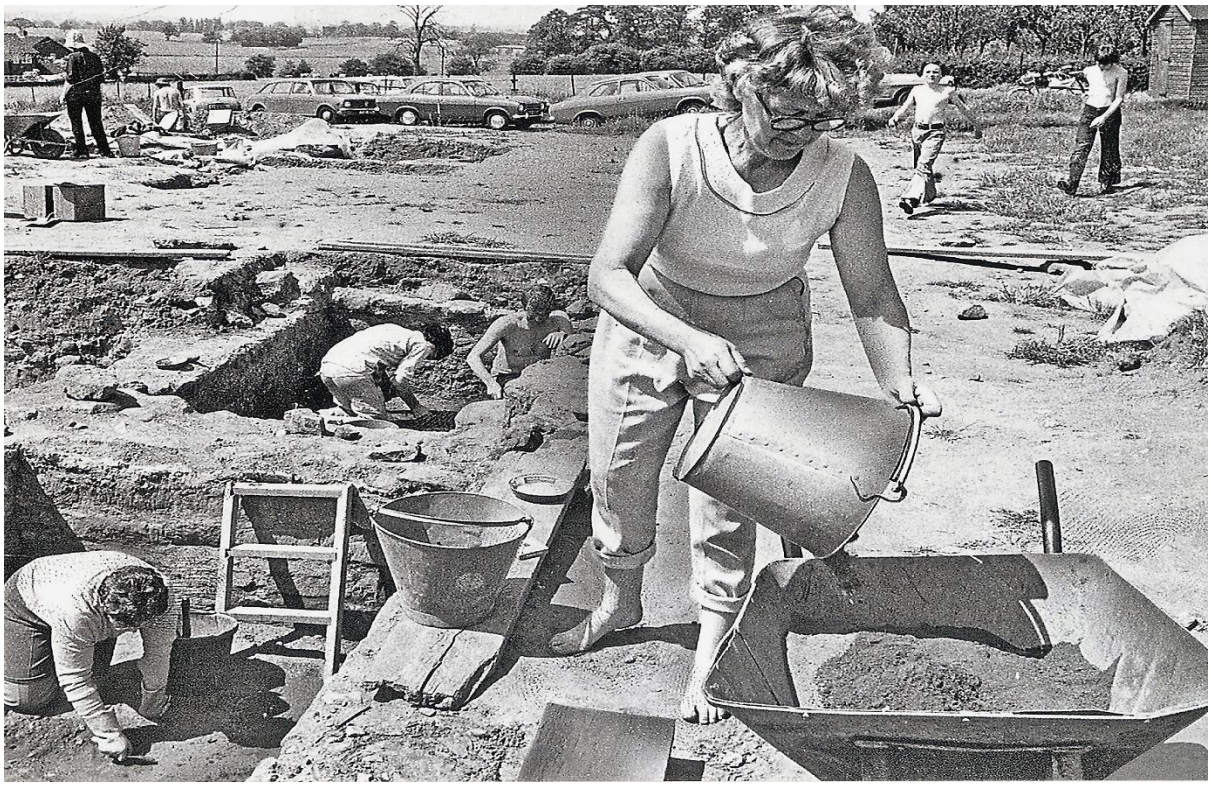
These stones had gone into the foundations?

They were right down at the bottom of the foundations. They were certainly older than the Roman mansio, pre-60 AD. Where they came from or how they came to be on the site, apart from this Romano-Celtic idea, I don't know. I don't think that anyone's really been able to find any site that may be a Celtic temple at Wall.

Where did you find your gold coin?

It was an eaves drip. An eaves drip is where water has come off a roof line and left jut a dark stain on the ground. It was at the very end of the building that you see now, on the side of the building next to the pathway to the church. I had been given the job of cleaning an eaves drip and I thought 'boring job', I didn't really want to do it, so I thought, 'just get on with it'. I was sitting there in the sunshine and something popped up and I thought it was a shiny stone. I nearly did not look at it, but something made me go back and look at it. Of course, I sat there with a gold coin in my hand thinking 'what do I do'? Do I hang on to it and say nothing or do I hand it in? Honesty got the better of me and I handed it to the site director, Bert Round. He was quite excited about that because it's the only gold that's ever been found on the site. It had to go to a coroner's court. He had to take it to the local police station. We had the police out at 11 o'clock at night because they'd never had anything so exciting before either. Bert gave them something to do on night duty. It caused a bit of a stir, but it was dated precisely to 68 AD, purely because of the Emperor's wife on the back and she was only his wife for a three or four month period in 68 AD, so spot on, we were able to get the date. It would be equivalent to a Roman soldier's annual salary, so somebody must have been very

upset about losing it. I've got a photograph of that. Gold comes out just as gold, it's completely recognisable, it doesn't decompose or rust or get any sort of oxide on the outside. With lead, you know its lead because of the weight and sometimes it will have a white coating of lead oxide on the outside. Iron obviously will rust, so you get a brown encrustation on the outside. Copper and bronze come out covered in verdigris, green, so you know what you've got there. You begin to learn very quickly what sort of metal you're dealing with.



Excavations at Wall 1975-76. Diana Wilkes at work bottom left. Joan Collier with bucket. Note footwear.

Did you get an impression of how the mansio was used?

We know from written reports, Tacitus is one, that the mansios were used as bed and breakfast stopovers for a change of horses and refreshments and for bathing purposes. And Wall is on Watling Street close to the junction with Ryknild Street; it would be an obvious place to build a mansio. We think from looking at the foundations it was probably a two storey building around a courtyard with a wooden veranda facing the Watling Street. The veranda was burnt at one point and again that was my job 'just excavate that area of burning will you'. It was timber so far up and then wooden pillars, a bit like a traditional veranda. Again, I thought, 'boring job' and then suddenly there was a cachet of a sickle and a hammer and various nails and a pair of shears as well. We're not sure if someone left it as a votive offering to the local gods on the site or whether it was somebody who was working on the site who put them down, and then the veranda caught fire and he left in a hurry. Why they were there we just don't know. One of the excavators said, 'you lucky devil, you always have all these lovely finds!'. When we were looking at the construction of the building, particularly the part that faces the bath house site, we found the scaffolding pole marks and they are identical to the scaffold dimensions that we have today, although they would be wooden. We found where the wooden posts were on the ground and we found the put log holes where the scaffold is fitted into the building as it went up. Scaffold is constructed very much like we do today. The building lift, from

your feet up to the next layer is five feet which is identical with the lifts we have today. It is incredible to think the engineering was so good in Roman times and still stands good today.

Do you think the mansio was a stone building? Obviously, the veranda was wooden.

We think to begin with it was possibly a wooden building because it was put up in a hurry to accommodate the travellers along Watling Street and Ryknild Street. We think that one was 60s AD. Later it was rebuilt in stone because people got used to their comforts, good wine and dining and bathing facilities. A more permanent structure was needed.

Did you find any evidence of underfloor heating in the mansio?

Yes, there was one area where we found underfloor heating in the mansio, it was only one tiny section, again on the side of the building facing the lane up the hill. There was evidence of pilae, the piles of tiles, and there was evidence of box flues that went up the sides of the walls. So, you'd not only got underfloor heating but you had heating that went up the walls as well and you were surrounded by warmth. But we never found the stoke hole for that, but there must have been one. It must have been that we weren't looking in the right area at the time because the brief was to look inside the main stone building and not expand on either side of it.

Did you find any evidence of tiled floors or ceiling decoration or wall decoration?

Floor tiles we never came across, but we definitely had painted plaster. The mansio must have been plastered on the inside at one point. We thought we got what we called the 'cult of the evil eye'. As the pieces of plaster came out, the decoration on them looked just like eyes. We had one girl Tina, who worked on the plastering as a project one holiday, she was able to piece some of the pieces together and it was a floral design that was going on. That blew our 'cult of the evil eye' but at the time it kept us amused.

What were the colours you were finding on the plaster?

There were yellows, reds and greens. They were the main ones I can remember. You would need skilled men who would come and paint on plaster so there must be a skilled army of people. The mansio itself must have been highly though of for it to have been decorated on the inside. The ordinary workmen's buildings wouldn't have been plastered or painted, just wattle and daub.

Was there any evidence of how the mansio had ended its life? Had there been a fire, or was it just taken apart do you think?

I can't remember that aspect ever been discussed on the site. For myself, my gut reaction is that it fell out of use for some reason and fell into decay. We know the baths fell into disrepair and out of use, so it would be logical for the mansio to fall out of use also.

The remains of the mansio, the stone from the walls and ceiling, do you think that's still on this site or do you think it's been taken away and reused?

Very often the stone is reused by local people because it was a convenient source of masonry. People would rob the site out and reuse it. I think there's some evidence near the church that Roman stone has been reused. The road that runs up from the Trooper to the church. I think if you look in the hedge there a lot of the stone that has been reused for propping the bank up. I did a watching brief at Wall House in 2000, and there was some evidence there, in the garden, that stone from the site had been reused in the garden as a rockery. It wouldn't be carried too far away, it would be too heavy. It would just be used in the locality.

Was there any excavation between the mansio and the bath house site?

At one time there was a short excavation down by the exercise yard. I can't remember if it was National Trust or English Heritage we were working for. They just wanted to confirm that it was an exercise yard. So that was a very brief excavation that probably didn't last any more that 6 months. Then it was backfilled and that was it. But no, otherwise there wasn't anything between the two.

Did you work on the bath house as well?

The bath house had mainly been excavated and laid out for the public to view before we got onto the site, so I just did that six months stint in the exercise yard.

Did you find anything?

No, not that I recall. It was just a boring exercise to confirm what we had on this site.

I've heard about 'erotic potica'. Where was 'erotica potica' found?

That was found on the mansio site itself. It had a very explicit sexual scene. It didn't leave anything to the imagination.

Was it Samian ware?

It was half a Samian ware bowl, easily a foot (30cm) in dimension, and obviously circular and standing on a plinth. There was great excitement over that. Bert Round, who was the site director at the time, was a very coy man, a very shy man, for want of a better description. When it turned up and he realised what we'd got he said I'll leave it in the shed and not tell the ladies what's on it, so he just left it there for us to go and have a look at it. It was the finest Samian ware, it must have been somebody's treasure. There were no marks underneath: very often you did get a potter's mark on Samian ware, but there were no potter's marks on this unless they were on the other half that we didn't find. It was very early Samian ware as far as I remember. It was sent to a Samian expert and I think he put it into 1st century AD. Often Samian ware will be repaired by the owner with a metal staple. Samian ware was a prized possession

Did you find any glass?

There was the odd bit of glass , yes, not a lot. We did find window glass; the sort of glass you get in churches that was held together with lead (leaded lights). It was green glass, we think it was probably from one of the windows in the mansio. You wouldn't get much light through it. The glass had been subjected to fire at one point because the glass was distorted and the lead very much melted. There wasn't an awful lot of glass vessels that we found, it was mainly window glass. There again, people would find glass vessels, bottles, bowls, plates would be expensive to buy so they tended to take them with them as their own personal belongings – if they were able to afford them. It was usually the more affluent who owned glass objects.

Did you find any jewellery at all, any beads?

I found a couple of intaglios. They are small decorations that fit into signed rings and they could be used as stamps for sealing by pressing into sealing wax to seal documents. You've heard of Willard White the gentleman who does the minute carvings? Some of them would be as minute as that and you can only see the decoration under a magnifying glass. How they make them I don't know.

What were they made from?

Some of them were glass or semi-precious stones like amber or cornelian (the same stones as the Staffordshire Hoard), and so delicately carved. Some of them were oval and some of them were round. I think we only ever had a couple of beads and these were chance finds. We did find things like tweezers close to the baths which we would expect to find anyway. When you finished Roman bathing, you went into an area where your body was oiled and then scraped with a strigil, which was like a little kitchen knife, and that would remove a lot of the dirt and debris from your body and you would have your eyebrows plucked. It wasn't surprising that we found tweezers there. And we found things for cleaning ears out, they were like miniature spoons for collecting wax, we found all these unpleasant things that were part and parcel of Roman life.

You must have good eyesight! Some of the things that you were finding were very tiny.

Sometimes you would just know that there was a difference underneath the trowel. Perhaps one area was a little bit sandier or grittier and you could not even see it, you could just feel it. Occasionally, although you were not meant to do it, the site director would ask you to draw a line with the point of your trowel, so that he could see what you could feel. Good eyesight was needed and if the weather was very dark or dull we would stop digging, as we were unable to see what was going on.

Did you use your own trowel?

Yes, we all prefer to have our own trowel. Each person has their own grip and the trowel wore to your most comfortable grip. If you picked up somebody else's trowel by mistake, it didn't feel right and it wasn't comfortable.

Did you find much evidence of what they were eating, you mentioned deer carcasses earlier?

We know they ate a lot of mussels from mussel shells found and those would have been carried in buckets of water from where they were caught. I don't think they would be very fresh when they got them but there were certainly many mussel shells on the site. We found the odd mutton bone so presumably they were eating mutton of some sort. There wasn't much evidence, although it also depends on the soil as well, an acidic soil would destroy any evidence of bones you might find, if you were lucky you'd pick up a stain where the carcass had been. The soil was quite acidic at Wall. Whatever had been put into the allotments would have destroyed anything. We never found material or leather at all.

The underfloor heating in the bath house would have required a lot of fuel, were they burning wood?

The name Letocetum means the grey wood, so presumably it was a wooded area. It was timber that they were burning, although surface coal was known.

In the bath house the pilae were exposed and then covered for their protection. Did you see them exposed?

Yes, I did. They were just standard pilae that you find in any Roman bath house or building anywhere. They were literally piles of tiles, and you could build them to the level required.

After all your work and the team's work, did you ever feel that Wall could have been more of a tourist site?

I think it could have been. At one point we did have an awful lot of children here. They came to use it as part of their Roman studies before the national curriculum came in. The curator at one time had at least two parties of school children each week during the spring and autumn terms. It was on a

par with the Roman site at Wroxeter at one time. Mainly because it was local, and it was easy to get to for local schools. It was certainly well used, and I think with a lot more publicity it could have been even better known that it was. We were devastated as a group of excavators when a decision was made to take away the curator and the site hut. We felt part of us had gone.

Were you there when they had a hut, and that was where they welcomed people onto the site?

Yes the hut was always there the whole of the time I was digging. It did not go until after we had finished on the site. It was a lovely point of contact for people because the curator was well versed in what was going on at Wall and in Roman history, so he was able to impart his knowledge. Once or twice I was asked to go back for school parties and tell them what I knew about the site, which was nice interaction. I did it for a group of Canadian students as well who came over to study Roman Britain. But all that seems to have gone.

Have there been no excavations since the year 2000?

There's been absolutely nothing. We finished down on the bath house site about 1990 and then we moved up onto Boland's paddock. Boland were the people who lived in Wall House at the time. They had the field at the back of Wall House and they allowed us to excavate. The access was opposite the Old Vicarage and we didn't know how to start on that site. It was Steve Campbell Kelly who was director and it was the first dig he had started, and he supervised. We called in someone who was used to using ground penetrating radar, which gave you the electrical vibes from the ground to give you an indication of what was under the ground, and we used water divining, believe it or not. I was very sceptical, I thought 'Ooh we will never get anything from this'. We had two metal rods, L shaped, you held the short part of the L, had your arms apart and you could feel the power of something pulling those rods together when you walked across water. It detected the plough furrows better than the ground penetrating radar. We also suspected there was a water course running down the hedgerow as well because the hedge, whatever the weather, was always green and the bank was always green. The divining rods had picked up on this watercourse.

Planning a day's work at 10.00am, Boland's Paddock near Wall House

Did you find anything other than agricultural finds?

On Boland's paddock we found what we thought was a blacksmith's working area. That was a flat cobble stone surface with a timber building which burnt down. Judging from the amount of nails and horseshoes that we found on site, it was indicative of a blacksmith or someone who shoes horses in the area. One area we thought might have picked up a Roman ditch because we are not sure how far the Roman site extended. Kenneth St Joseph, who was an aerial photographer and archaeologist did a lot of aerial photography in the 1960s, and some of his pictures show Roman activity for quite a wide area up as far as Muckley Corner and a similar distance the other way as well. I think most of his work is in Cambridge University now.

Were you involved in the site opposite the car park, before they built the bungalows?

Yes, that was a rescue excavation that had to be done in a hurry because of the imminent builders moving in. We think we found the equivalent of a Roman Town Hall. We got evidence of a very big building. We found the corner edges of one and there were some vast drains running down to it. That excavation report still has to be written up. But we didn't have time to do that site justice before the builders moved in, we were just able to confirm that it was occupied by the Romans. We think that near where there was part of a sewage mechanism, there was a Roman road, the A5 coming from there. There was an Agger which is usually an indication of a Roman road. The Roman road would be up on a bank with ditches either side which would take any run off water. The Romans were exact in the way they built roads. They put hardcore in the bottom and built it up in layers starting with the very big gravel and getting finer and finer, until they got a level surface, and then sometimes they would put blocks of stone on the top, so it had got a very firm surface. Once you had excavated a Roman road you never forget it and you can recognise it instantly and we suspect it was a bit of what Mick Aston had been asked to excavate when he was there. We were a wonderful team. It was lots of fun and laughter, but we worked incredibly hard. We used to be on site for half-past nine in the morning and very often finished at five.

Who was it funded the digs?

It was the Staffordshire Archaeological & Historical Society who provided us with the equipment. We volunteers just gave our services free of charge. Anything we wanted, material wise, then we would go to the society and ask for if they would be willing to provide equipment for us.

How did you get to Wall, it can't have been easy?

When I first started, I took the bus to Muckley Corner and walked in from Muckley Corner. Bert Round was so concerned for my safety (it was when the bypass had just been opened) that he would often come up to Muckley Corner and pick me up. He would take me back to Muckley Corner at the end of the day, or Shire Oak as there was a better bus service from there and more buses. Mick Aston came into Shenstone on the train and walked from Shenstone. We had other people who came in on bikes and most people had cars anyway. When I got married my husband used to take me in and pick me up. He used to have the day to himself.

And you all paid for your own transport?

Yes, none of us claimed any expenses.

Did you bring sandwiches with you?

When I first started we went down to the Trooper at Wall for lunch. It was a Mr Russell who was the licensee. He was a very elderly man so we had to get sn order in for sandwiches by half past ten in

the morning and it was very often my job to go round and ask what filling people would like and then trot down to the pub and say 'Here's the order, can we have it for one o'clock please?'. We had lunch from about one until two, although we usually didn't take the whole hour. That in itself was a little community in the pub, local people playing skittles and dominoes and they were always chatting to us and asking what we'd found. I think it was Mr Russell's daughter who took over the licence, Mrs Hood, and she became the licensee. The Hoods moved on to Whittington eventually. It was the Hoods who really pulled the pub up. Mr Russell kept the pub ticking over. You went into the toilet and you often wondered if the toilet chain would work. One of these toilets with a cast iron cistern somewhere on the wall. But, he had a wonderful fire going at lunchtime, a coal fire, and of course it gave us a chance to warm up. Very often we would be working in conditions where as fast as you were scraping it would be freezing again. Very often I would get home and sit in the bath and I couldn't feel from my waist downwards. I wouldn't know if the water was hot or not until I'd thawed out!

Did they provide you with any cover overhead, when you were digging, and it was raining?

We rigged our own cover with plastic sheeting, but we could only use that when we had got down to about five or six feet, when there was enough to roll the sheet of plastic over the top and then the light wasn't really very good. If you'd got anything delicate that you were excavating, such as a grave, you wouldn't be able to see the outlines of anything, so normally if it was raining or the weather was too bad, we would cover up and go into a shed on site and wait for the worst of the weather to pass over and then go back out again. We worked in blizzards, I know there was one day when – I've inherited a family trait of being able to smell snow, it's due to the extra ozone layer in the air apparently – and one day I said 'It's going to snow, you'd better cover up', and a man beside me said 'Stupid woman, you can't smell snow'. So we just left him and covered up and within half an hour there was a blizzard and he was left out there covering up his bit on his own. He never criticised me again.

Did you have any people on the dig from Wall?

No we had people who would come and talk to us over the fence or stand on the edge of the site and talk to us , because they were interested in what was going on, but we didn't have any of the Wall inhabitants. The only person who really showed much interest was the lady who now lives in the Old Vicarage and her husband, he was a gynaecologist, their name was Ferguson. They came over to Boland's Paddock and they were really very interested in what we were doing. They even offered us the Vicarage garden, their garden, to see what they had got, but unfortunately, her mother became poorly. She had got her parents living with her, so it really wasn't a viable proposition for them or us. We expected people to possibly offer help, but they didn't. One lady who lived in one of the cottages opposite the bungalows, and when we started excavating down there she did come across and provided us with some sandwiches and coffee to keep us going which was nice and very welcome.

How did you manage for facilities? Did you use the village Hall? Obviously you used the toilets at The Trooper.

Well it was the toilets at The Trooper or it was finding a convenient bush somewhere. Usually that's where the churchyard came in for a convenient gravestone. Latterly, we were provided with a port-a-loo although that was never pleasant to use, and somebody always had the job of emptying it which was an unpleasant job itself. Usually you said, 'I'm going off to the loo', and people were aware where you were and what you were doing.

Did you have a village shop to visit?

The nearest shop was at Muckley Corner and it was in one of those low terrace cottages up there because I used it to buy chocolate and things once or twice, until I had a bar of milk chocolate that had turned completely white, so it was very out of date, after that I stopped using it. There was no shop, no nothing. It was a very rural area.

Did you have access to the building that they use as the museum now?

We could have used it. Very often if you went out of the site, you would have to go down to the curator for the key if the museum wasn't open and if he wasn't on the site for any reason you couldn't get into the museum at all. It was pretty primitive out on the site. If you were lucky and someone had left a bucket out from one week to the next you might have a bucket of rainwater to wash your hands in before lunch, otherwise you were eating your sandwiches with muddy hands. Nobody seemed to get any health problems during the dig so we must have been a pretty sturdy lot.

It's one thing to be doing this in the summertime, but in the cold winter…

Sometimes it was horrendous. I went there looking like the Michelin Man and peeling off four or five layers when I got home. And even then, you weren't really warm, unless you volunteered to do the barrow run. People were emptying buckets from the excavation area into a barrow and you were taking it to the top of the spoil heap and then you got the exercise to get your circulation going. It was my job to teach the ladies how to empty the barrow. One frosty morning, I got one young girl who was doing a university course, and she had come during her holidays in the New Year; her attitude was, 'I can empty a barrow, I know how to do that'. I said 'Watch the frost it's coming out of the spoil heap and it's going to be very slippery', but she shrugged her shoulders because she knew better. Up she went, the barrow went one way and she went the other way. After that she decided that she would listen to what people were telling her.

Do you think things disappeared from site or did people come on and damage it? Obviously, you couldn't 'police it' and there were times when there was nobody there.

We never had any evidence that things were damaged, or anybody took things. I think the fact we had a curator down at the mansio site helped because someone was always on duty. It was Mr Ted Linney, his father was very astute and aware. If anyone had been on site, you could guarantee that he would have noticed. It wouldn't have stopped anyone coming on site overnight, but we left it so well covered. If you leave the excavation area open to the elements, even for a week, it's surprising how quickly it deteriorates. We covered everything over with plastic sheeting held down with planks or buckets filled with soil from the excavation just to give it that bit of protection. That would probably stop people getting onto the site and digging to see if they could find any 'treasure'. It would be a bit of an effort to remove what we had put down. It very often took us a good half an hour first thing in the morning and last thing at night to cover everything up so that it was protected.

How many times a week did you do, or did it vary?

We usually dug on a Saturday. When we were doing the excavations down on the bungalow site then we dug on Saturdays, Sundays and days during the week in the school holidays. Quite a few of us were teachers so during school holidays we were free to go on the site, so we did extra days. That was an emergency, we knew we had to get something done quickly so we put in extra time there. We did try extending the days we dug but most people were busy with paid employment and couldn't spare the time during the week and people often said that they wanted a day to themselves on a Sunday.

Were there many photographs taken?

People have probably got photographs in their own personal collections, as I have, but these would be scattered across the excavation period. No-one, to my knowledge, has ever made an attempt to draw the photographs together. I think Mike Hodder put out an appeal for photographs at one point. I remember him as a school boy and then doing A levels. He was working alongside me once or twice. Mike asked me if I knew anyone who had photographs and I could point him to James Debney. He used a drone to go over the site. Frank and Nancy Ball took photographs but their stuff is now in Birmingham Museum.

Of course, this is just what I remember and my own thoughts. Others may disagree.

Diana Wilkes

The year 2021 marks 200 years since the death of Napoleon. A historian from North Staffordshire asks an unlikely question:

What connects Napoleon with Trentham?

Nothing much, you would expect. But you'd be wrong. A man with the wonderfully exotic name of Zenon Vantini worked for both. Moreover, he eventually became the first manager of the first railway-built hotel in the world (at Euston) and almost certainly the first person to organise fully-inclusive, commercial package holidays abroad – to Paris, in 1844, eleven years before Thomas Cook. Yet very few historians have ever heard of him.

Vantini's connection with Trentham dates from the 1830s when he became head house steward to the 2nd Duke and Duchess of Sutherland. As such he was responsible for the management of all of the family's households and servants, whether based at Stafford House in London (now called Lancaster House) or at their country seat at Trentham. Organising the Sutherlands' travel arrangements was an important part of his job, and included regular trips up to their house at Dunrobin in the north of Scotland as well as extended tours throughout Europe – including France, Rome, Naples, Tuscany, Austria, Bavaria, Prussia, the Rhineland and the Netherlands. The Sutherlands spent more time abroad than usual during this period because Trentham was undergoing transformation into a beautiful Italianate villa designed by a young architect called Charles Barry. The work took longer than expected and as soon as the family returned to England Vantini was sent up to Trentham to hurry it along. Alas we have only a few remnants left today to remind us of the glorious house it became.

Vantini left the Sutherlands in 1839-40 to begin his new career as hotelier to the London & Birmingham Railway Company. Eventually he returned to France to open a luxurious hotel opposite to the Louvre in central Paris. He died in Paris in 1870.

But turning back time, what was the connection with Napoleon? It appears that the Vantini family was well-known on the Mediterranean island of Elba, where they had settled in the 1500s. During Zenon's early childhood, his father became the mayor of the major town on Elba and thus was introduced to Napoleon. A few years later, this connection resulted in the teenager being appointed as one of six young aides to the ex-emperor on his exile to the island in 1814. In Vantini's case he was given special duties in relation to the security and

travel of Napoleon's mother who had arrived on the island to live with her son and who took up residence in the Vantinis' old family town-house. Zenon, though aged only seventeen, must have become a familiar face to Napoleon; we have records of the young man walking along the beach with him and helping to arrange picnics.

Zenon stayed with Napoleon as long as possible. When the latter decided to return to France in 1815 to recover his empire, Zenon went with him. In April 1815 he was enlisted in one of the regiments of the Imperial Guard, as lieutenant and surveillance officer during the battle of Waterloo. He remained with his regiment during the retreat of the defeated army back to Paris and was formally released in August 1815, with the stipulation that he returned to Elba.

What happened immediately afterwards remains a mystery. There are still gaps in his story, but we do know that in 1820 he had moved to England. In 1825 he married a Swiss girl with whom he had a family of seven girls, and had embarked on his career in managing the houses of the English aristocracy and later the first railway hotels. He had no sons to follow in his footsteps, either as soldier or businessman.

Zenon Vantini: From Grand Tour to Package Holiday.

By Pamela Sambrook Published by the Lutterworth Press, P.O. Box 60, Cambridge, CB1 2NT, 01223 350865
Available now
Full price £20 plus postage, from orders@lutterworth.com, or most bookshops' websites.

Burton Leander Rowing Club

Gerard Wilcox has privately published his history of the **Burton Leander Rowing Club**. As Gerard reports, it existed in 1847 but may have been founded slightly earlier. Burton Leander is one of the oldest rowing clubs in Britain and the fact that it was established on the River Trent makes its formation and continuance especially significant. It was, and continues to be, a community asset, different in many ways to the wider rowing perspective of its time where it was dominated by the two ancient Universities and public schools. Gerard has very skilfully charted its development over more than one hundred and seventy years and provides a strong sense of how it has developed its sporting presence on the east bank of the River Trent at Burton, explaining its competitive history and also how its facilities have developed. This is a very important contribution to sports literature.

Trevor James

A copy will be placed in Burton Local Studies Centre later in the year. Copies at £12-00 plus £3-00 postage can be obtained from Gerard on gerardwilcox@hotmail.com

Annual Membership Subscriptions SA&HS Year 2021-2022

Renewal of annual Membership of SA&HS became due as at 1st September 2021. The subscription rates have once again been held, not having changed since 2013. They remain for the various categories: Individual £20.00. Joint £30.00. Student/Unwaged £15.00. Many Members choose to pay by bank standing order, so renewal is taken care of. Others are already paid up in advance. Otherwise there are of course the different ways to pay: you can send a cheque in the post (payable to SA&HS), make a bank transfer (please enquire the Society's bank details) or use PayPal to make payment electronically using your bank card, in which case please go to our website https://www.sahs.uk.net and follow the links – on webpage 'Joining Us'. We would recommend PayPal – it is secure, quick and easy. Payments are always acknowledged – by email from both PayPal and the Hon. Membership Secretary/Treasurer. Cheques should be sent to: Keith Billington, Hon. Membership Secretary, SA&HS, 4 Gainsbrook Crescent, Norton Canes, Cannock, Staffordshire, WS11 9TN. It is NOT necessary to fill in a Membership application form.

If you are unsure whether you are currently paid up, or if perhaps you would like to enquire about setting up a standing order, please contact the Hon. Membership Secretary/Treasurer. Email: kjboutthere@yahoo.co.uk

Thank you.

FOR USE BY NEW MEMBERS WISHING TO JOIN

STAFFORDSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGICAL & HISTORICAL SOCIETY

APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP 2021/2022

SOCIETY YEAR COMMENCING 1st SEPTEMBER 2021

Annual Subscription Rates: Individual £20 Joint £30 Student/Unemployed £15

Title(s)…… Full Name(s) ……

Postal Address……

…….. Postcode ……..

Email Address……

Telephone Number……..

I/We enclose £…… re applicable annual subscription for the year 2021/22 for Individual / Joint / Student / Unemployed Membership. Please make your cheque payable to SA&HS.

Signed …… Date ……..

Please send the completed form with your payment to Mr Keith Billington, SA&HS Honorary Membership Secretary, 4 Gainsbrook Crescent, Norton Canes, Cannock, Staffordshire, WS11 9TN.

NB Alternatively you can join SA&HS by using the online facility available at the Society's website:

https://www.sahs.uk.net You will be asked to select the PayPal option to make your payment

SA&HS Autumn Lecture Programme

The first lecture this autumn, following the summer break, will be: *1346: Crecy*, a talk to be given by Dr Gillian White on Friday evening 24th September 2021. This will again be delivered by means of Zoom. The Battle of Crecy was the first decisive victory over the French for Edward III in the Hundred Years War. Gillian White gave an excellent Zoom talk back in April (*Henry VIII and the Field of Cloth of Gold)* and we expect this next presentation to be similarly most interesting.

We are planning a programme of 6 lectures this autumn, September to December, which mirrors what we normally do each year. All these 6 lectures, so leading up to the Christmas period, and including the 2021 AGM 62 on Friday 3rd December, will be presented once again via the means of Zoom. For details see appendix. This decision to continue just with Zoom has not been taken lightly. Despite the Government announcement of a return to a measure of normality on 19th July involving the removal of mandatory restrictions in England, we consider the uncertainties and concerns surrounding everything for the moment to be too significant. Caution has to remain the watchword. Current thinking on our part is that we will look to a possible return to presenting at the Guildhall in Lichfield from January 2022 onwards, if we consider it appropriate [and above all practical] to do so, though with the occasional Zoom lecture mixed in, as extras. This is our hope anyway.

You may wish to voice your opinion on our continuing use of Zoom for the time being. By all means provide us with your feedback. It's best please if you can email by return. Anything and all you've got to say will be noted. It will be appreciated. Thank you.

You may have missed the report 'Peeling back the layers, a community archaeology project at Under Whitle, Sheen' on the excavations from 20th June 2016 to 9th July 2016 on behalf of The Tudor Farming Interpretation Group for Peeling Back the Layers Community Archaeology Project. This was an interesting project involving map, geomagnetic and lidar surveys as well as excavation. Under Whitle is in the far north of Staffordshire almost on the boundary with Derbyshire. The detailed report can be found at; Excavation-Report-Parker-Heath-.pdf (peelingbackthelayers.org). A new project focusses on exploring and excavating a potential medieval house platform in the Peak District partly investigated in 2016. Volunteers are doing some specialised Archaeobotanical sampling which will hopefully provide evidence of the range of crops grown, telling the team more about what farming practices might been and what the environment around the farmstead looked like. In addition to all this, members of the TFIG are researching medieval wills and putting Census results on a spreadsheet which is building up a picture of local residents and their relationships within and beyond the parish of Sheen. The project will put the results of the work in the context of historical research to present

a picture of how local people lived in the past and contribute new aspects to the story of Whitle which has been evolving since at least the 14th century. The project is in partnership with the Potteries Museum.

The fieldwork is going to be taking place between Aug 23rd and Sept 12th, **and there's an 'open day' on Sunday Sept 5th.** You can contact the team
Email: diggingdeeper.underwhitle@outlook.com

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Drag yourself away from that screen and come on these site-based events!

Saturday 11 September (Part of Birmingham Heritage Week)**:** Medieval Yardley guided walks, starting from Blakesley Hall B25 8RN. Prior booking essential, small charge https://www.birminghammuseums.org.uk/blakesley

Tuesday 14 September, 10am (Part of Birmingham Heritage Week)**:** Sutton Park Archaeology Walk with the Friends of Sutton Park Association. Free, booking not required. Meet at Town Gate (off Park Road, B73 6BU; Bus/train to Sutton Coldfield town centre, 0.5 miles away). Please wear suitable outdoor clothing and footwear. Details: http://fospa.org.uk/

Saturday 2 October, 10am: Sutton Park Archaeology Walk with the Friends of Sutton Park Association. Free, booking not required. Meet at Jamboree Stone in centre of Sutton Park (vehicle access from Streetly Gate B74 3EW). Please wear suitable outdoor clothing and footwear. Details: http://fospa.org.uk/

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Do you enjoy using or studying British and Irish Ordnance Survey maps old and new?

Are you interested in who produces them and how they do it?

THEN THE CHARLES CLOSE SOCIETY WELCOMES YOU!

The next Meeting of the Midland Group is at Wall Village Hall on Tuesday 28th September, commencing at 7.30. All welcome; this is a Bring and Tell event.

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News from the Archives; Staffordshire County Council and its partner the William Salt Library Trust, has received a National Lottery Heritage Fund grant of £3,964,000 towards the Staffordshire History Centre project, which involves the rebuilding and renovation of the current Staffordshire Record Office and William Salt

Library in Eastgate Street Stafford. The current thinking is that the Record Office will close in January 2022 and reopen late in 2023 in its new guise. Currently the Record Office is open to a limited number of readers from 10.00 Tuesday to Friday but seats must be booked in advance and items also ordered in advance. If you have any pressing research to do now is the time to book a desk! (Phone 01785 278379) The Lichfield History Centre has reopened and seats must be booked through Lichfield Library (Phone 01543 334539)

Ingestre and Tixall

I am a Trustee of Ingestre Orangery and Anne Andrews has bequeathed us a filing cabinet full of a wealth of documents covering the history of Ingestre and Tixall.

We can house the archive, but we would like someone to collate it for us , and I was given your name by Jim Andrews , If you could help us to find someone that would be amazing .

We are also keen to recruit more trustees. I look forward to hearing from you with any help on these two matters

Kind Regards Geoff Tavernor tavernortavernor@btinternet.com

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Talk by Tristram Hunt

The Radical Potter: Josiah Wedgwood and the Transformation of Britain Friday 10 September 4 – 5pm To launch his new book, The Radical Potter: Josiah Wedgwood and the Transformation of Britain, Tristram Hunt, former Stoke-on-Trent MP and Director of the Victoria and Albert Museum, will present a talk at the museum. For the first time, Hunt defines the political radicalism of Wedgwood's thinking, politics and social innovation. This new biography, strongly based on Wedgwood's notebooks, letters and the words of his contemporaries, captures the energy and originality of Wedgwood, and his transformative contributions not only to the development of eighteenth-century Britain but to modern business practices ever since. Tristram Hunt will also be signing copies of his book during the event. This is a free talk, to be held at the Potteries Museum and Art Gallery but places must be booked in advance by calling 01782 232323 or emailing MuseumEvents@stoke.gov.uk.

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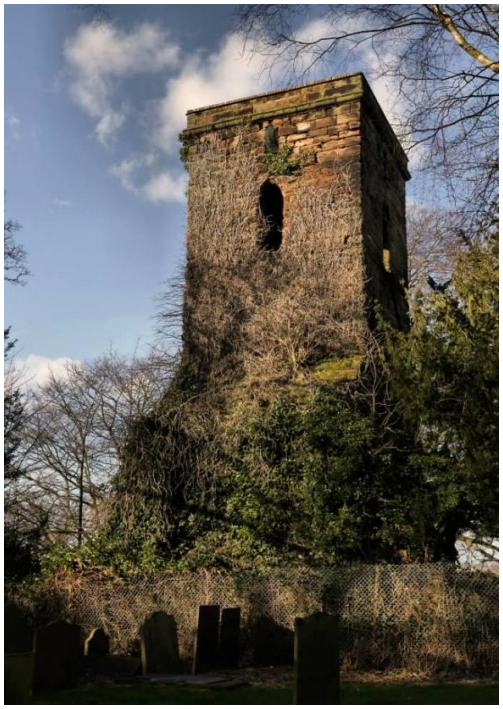
Friends of Shenstone Tower (FoST) – An Update as at 30th July 2021

SA&HS published an article on FoST in N/L 133 Jan 2020. The following is a press release from FoST (written by the latter) kindly made available to SA&HS for inclusion in this current Newsletter 138:

Plans are now progressing apace for the restoration of Shenstone's old church Tower. We have now set up the Friends (FoST) as a charity, raised sufficient funds, obtained planning permissions and a lease, and have a start date of 16th August for the renovation and preservation of the Tower. Of course, fund-raising will continue to loom large in our lives to provide for the future use and maintenance of the Tower.

The Tower is all that remains of Shenstone's medieval church which was built around 1200. This was built on the foundations of the first church in Shenstone which was built in Saxon times. The current church was built in the 19th century and the old church was knocked down apart from the old Tower which was left standing; the outline of the old church can still be seen in the churchyard.

Funding support of the project has been eye-wateringly impressive. Significant donations have come from many members of our community. We have also been supported by Lichfield District Council, Shenstone Parish Council, Shenstone Village Festival, Shenstone & Lichfield Artisans Golf Society and Friends of Greysbrooke School. Excellent support has also come from charitable institutions large and small including Historic England, HS2, The Garfield Weston Foundation, The Pilgrim Trust, The Leche Trust, and Bells Whisky. We are so grateful for this massive support from the whole community, for all donations large and small – they all played their part in helping to get our project under way.



The Old Tower, Shenstone

We have retained the services of Mark Parsons, architect at Anthony Short & Partners, and he has completed plans for the restoration of the church Tower. These plans have been approved by Lichfield Diocese and Lichfield District Council. Now the plans are approved, Friends of Shenstone Tower have leased the building from the church, which allows us to access our grants and complete the renovation. The lease will run for 23 years, which allows the Friends to open the building for the enjoyment and education of the public. Part of the approval process was a bat survey that confirmed there are none in residence in the Tower. We also have approval to remove the self-set yew tree directly in front of the Tower, and we will replace this by planting another yew tree elsewhere in the churchyard.

We have already removed much of the ivy from the Tower to enable us to see accurately the true state of the walls and enabled the preparation of a meaningful, comprehensive design for their repair. The plans also include the design of internal floors and stairs which will enable safe access to the roof. The old roof has rotted away and the restoration includes its replacement and raising the parapet by 1.1 metres to meet safety regulations; the parapet will then consist of four courses of stonework where there are two at present, which rebuilds the parapet to its original height as can be seen in old pictures of the Tower. This will allow safe public access to the roof, which will be by arrangement only. When the repair of the Tower is complete, further work will be done to provide suitable facilities to open the Tower to the public. Work will start on the Tower on 16th August, and the Builders have agreed with the church where to site their facilities and equipment store, to minimise disruption.

Friends of Shenstone Tower (FoST) **30th July 2021**

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This newsletter is edited for the Staffordshire Archaeological and Historical Society by Richard Totty richard.totty4@gmail.com

Views expressed herein do not necessarily represent those of the Society

Website: www.sahs.uk.net

Appendix

The ZOOM Lectures for 2021

24th September Dr Gillian White

1346:Crécy

Dr. Gillian White specialises in the history and visual arts of late medieval and sixteenth-century England. She began her career at the Warwickshire Museum and then worked for the National Trust as Curator / Collections Manager at Hardwick Hall, about which she then wrote her PhD at Warwick University. She now teaches art history part-time in the Continuing Education Department at Oxford University, as well as freelance lecturing and teaching.

Since 1337, England and France had been engaged in what would become known as The Hundred Years' War. So far, there had been raids and skirmishes, and one major sea battle, but in July 1346 King Edward III launched an invasion of Normandy. In the following months, Edward would lead his army to the very outskirts of Paris before turning northwards towards Calais. But between the English and the sea lay a French army and, out-numbered and out-manoeuvred, Edward was forced to stand and fight at Crécy. This talk tells the story of the campaign, the battle and the struggle to control a channel port that followed.

8th October Kevin Cootes

Poulton Research Project Cheshire

Kevin Cootes graduated from Liverpool University in 1989, then moved to Sheffield to complete a Masters Degree followed by a PhD in 2012. He has been Site Director for the Poulton Research Project since 2013.
The Poulton Research Project started out life in 1995 as a joint project

between Chester Archaeology and Liverpool University as a training base for students but has evolved. It is a multi-period archaeological site and excavations have produced myriad finds spanning across 10000 years. The site was discovered during the search for a lost Cistercian Abbey. The excavations revealed the foundations of a Medieval Chapel and associated graveyard with an estimated 2000 burials.

22nd October Graeme Young

Bamburgh Research Project - Bamburgh Bowl Hole Cemetary: Life and Death in an Early Medieval Palace

Graeme Young (Project Director) is a graduate of Newcastle University and has been excavating since 1988. He has excavated sites across the UK and worked for a period in Africa. A founder member of the BRP, Graeme has directed excavations on Lindisfarne and in Newcastle and Durham prior to leading the archaeological research at Bamburgh Castle. His particular interest is the Anglo-Saxon and Medieval archaeology of Northumberland, but he has been known to stoop to prehistory on occasion.

The Bamburgh Research Project is an independent, non-profit archaeological project investigating Bamburgh Castle in Northumberland, one of the most important archaeological sites currently under excavation in northern England. The BRP team have also investigated a prehistoric site just a few miles from the castle, the Bradford Kaims. Since 1996 they have been working to uncover the history of this fascinating castle and its environs, from prehistory to the present day. The BRP aims, through its work, to bring the past to life for everyone.

5th November Professor Henry Chapman

Stonehenge:The Hidden Landscapes

Henry Chapman is a prehistorian specialising primarily in the archaeology of wetlands. Henry has worked for the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England, the University of Hull and Channel 4's Time Team. He is currently Professor of Archaeology at the University of Birmingham and is a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries. The lecture this evening will bring us up to date with the investigations at Stonehenge and the surrounding covering the hidden landscapes project.

19th November Dr Mathew Morris

Leicester and Roman Africa:Ancient Muticulturalism in the English Midlands
A closer examination of Leicester's links with Roman Africa.

Mathew has worked for University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) since 2004, excavating a wide range of rural and urban archaeology across the Midlands, from the Prehistoric period through to the Industrial Revolution. He graduated from the University of Leicester in 2003 with a BA in Archaeology and an MA in Landscape Studies. His interests include urban archaeology, community archaeology along with Roman and Medieval archaeology. In his spare time he helps run the Leicester Fieldworkers and the Leicester branch of the Young Archaeologists' Club.

3rd December TBC - Invite out there

This meeting on Friday 3rd December will also include the 2021 Annual General Meeting which as with last years AGM will be held using Zoom

The Zoom lectures in the autumn will start as ever at 8.00 pm. Emails will be issued to the Membership in advance, in the week of the talk, firstly confirming it and providing details, then on the relative Friday, issuing the necessary participation information with log-in link to be able to attend.

Excursions will resume in the New Year.