



January 2009

No. 85

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## FORTHCOMING EVENTS

- February 18 **After the Archer:**  
*Recent discoveries at Boscombe Down*  
Andy Manning, Project Manager, Wessex Archaeology  
2.30pm at the Melor Hall
- March 18 **Pictures of Amesbury**  
*Slides and photographs from Julian Beacham's collection*  
2.30pm at the Melor Hall
- April 15 **The Trafalgar Estates of South Wiltshire**  
Pat Sheppard, Blue Badge Guide  
7.30pm at the Melor Hall

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## ANTROBUS HOUSE

Although the elegant facade and interior are familiar to local residents, the story behind the building may not be so well-known.

Sir Edmund and Lady Florence Antrobus of Amesbury Abbey had one son Edmund who served in the Grenadier Guards and, sadly, was killed in October 1914 at Ypres. His name appears on the Menin Gate. His father died soon after, perhaps of a broken heart. Lady Florence died in 1923 and, in her Will, decreed that some of her belongings should be housed in a suitable building which was to be a memorial to her son. The house was opened in 1925, with the upper room as a museum - the exhibits including the splendid Flitcroft Book of Mapps which is now in the County archives.

Some artefacts had to be sold to finance the house, though some remain in cabinets in the upper hall.

The house is administered by seven trustees of whom your Treasurer is one, having been nominated in 1986 by the then County Councillor, John Haywood.

Income from lettings and investments allows Antrobus House to be completely self-supporting. It is a registered charity but has no funds to distribute.

There are two portraits of Edmund, and a large one of his mother which dominates the staircase. Amesbury is indeed fortunate to have such a splendid "Village Hall".

Mary Underwood

## **THE AMESBURY PROJECT: THE OPEN UNIVERSITY EXCAVATION AT BLICK MEAD BELOW VESPASIAN'S CAMP**

Whilst internationally sponsored archaeological work at Stonehenge and Durrington Walls has seized the public interest, Amesbury's very own project has continued relatively unnoticed not very far away. For the last three years a small and dedicated Open University-led team of professionals, undergraduate students and local residents has been evaluating a small natural basin surrounding a spring on the western edge of the town near the Iron Age fort known as Vespasian's Camp. The site has been given the informal title of Blick Mead after the field name found on nineteenth century estate and tithe maps. Their work, on private land on the margin of Abbey Parkland, has revealed human presence from as early as the Neolithic period, through the Middle Ages to the present day.

The site occupies an area of approximately two tennis courts and overlooks the River Avon to the south. Its proximity to the ancient Harroway trackway and the Stonehenge Avenue suggests it was close to the centre of key transport links and human movement to the area. Vespasian's Camp was probably outlined in bright white chalk in prehistory, and would have been visible for miles around, thus linking it with major barrow groups across Salisbury Plain. It is increasingly clear that the fort would have been a most prominent marker until it was landscaped in the second half of the 18th century, when many of its ancient stories were also 'covered over'. In the Saxon period, and perhaps for many centuries before, Amesbury and its environs were part of the royal estates.

Finds at this parkland site have included prehistoric flint artefacts, an Iron Age boundary formed by hedging or fencing, Roman glass, and horse bones. A track paved with flint cobbles leading down to the water was uncovered, and a small part of the level margin of the spring-carved basin is packed with small chalk cobbles. With the spring in use for at least four thousand years, the area must have been quite a thoroughfare, and was, perhaps, a place of ritual in the Neolithic and Bronze ages, connected to the wider Stonehenge landscape. In Roman and later periods it may have witnessed settlement or industry. Many aspects of the site remain a fascinating puzzle, and only further investigation will allow the fullest possible story to be revealed.

Whilst digs with international acclaim can command significant funding, this one has to rely on £500 a time, to allow long-weekend evaluations, with people making voluntary contributions to keep the work going. It is providing an excellent training ground for student archaeologists, and historians.

The next stages of the work include sending artefacts to the laboratory to be dated by the radiocarbon procedure, and employing a water pump to investigate the deeper parts of the sedimentary record in the small basin. This will require more funding and so, with tantalising glimpses of Amesbury's heritage appearing, and much work yet to be done, the project is hoping the town will lend a hand to help uncover its history. Information on how to contribute can be found via Amesbury's website at:

<http://www.this-is-amesbury.co.uk/enter.html>, and clicking on 'The Amesbury Project' in the left-hand menu. This facility has been kindly provided by the Website

Manager Colin Bracher. Wider information on this project can be found on the Open University website at: <http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/classtud/amesbury/index.html>

Around a hundred and twenty people attended a progress meeting at Amesbury's Methodist Church on Friday evening 23 January given by project leader David Jacques and colleague Dr Peter Hoare (The University of Sydney). Dr Hoare outlined the geological context of the site, indicating that it was a natural feature that had undergone relatively little human modification.

David Jacques explained the archaeological work. This has produced flint artefacts and pottery fragments, a flint cobble track and a spring-side platform constructed of small chalk cobbles, indicating a human presence from the Neolithic period to modern times.

Recently there had been some particularly exciting finds: clear signs of an extensive settlement, possibly of the Iron Age; and a small lead cylinder very similar to the 'rolled lead curses' used in the Roman period which has been taken to the British Museum for examination.

The proximity of the site to Stonehenge, Durrington Walls and the River Avon strengthens its importance and the possibility of links to these other features.

There was a good number of searching questions from the audience. Of particular interest was the future of the items found at the site. David Jacques indicated that many were still undergoing analysis, and that Salisbury Museum had been very helpful with interpretation. The possibility of a museum at Amesbury had been considered over the years, and the increasing number of artefacts and other evidence of the town's development might merit serious consideration of this.

During an interval, the Amesbury Girls' Brigade provided refreshments. David thanked the church members for their help in organising the event, and the public for its continuing support and interest.

If sufficient funding can be acquired, work will continue at this significant site during the current year in unravelling what has become an exciting and challenging interpretive task.

Peter Goodhugh

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## AMESBURY WAR MEMORIAL BOOK

Work is still in progress on the book of the names of recorded on the War Memorial. Bill Dunn and I have just about completed a short description of nearly all the names inscribed, but we are having a little difficulty trying to edit the whole to make a coherent narrative.

Bill, by taking on the research for the fallen of the 1st World War, 80 years after the Armistice, has had the more difficult task in finding details of many names. My task, doing the 2nd World War period, has been comparatively easy. But even now there are gaps from both wars and we would still like to discover more about the following:-

***Private Albert Chambers.*** Bill has done a great deal of research and found a man from Bulford, but there is still a lingering doubt that this is the right man. ►

**Private William Wallen.** Again Bill has spent much time and effort on him, despite Wallen being an old Amesbury name and there are many old photos on which the name crops up. Was he related to the Mr Wallen who was a carter for Mr Sandell's farm and who lived in New Barn Cottages on the left going up Beacon Hill? Please somebody let Bill or me know!

From the 2nd War the only complete mystery is an LAC Edward Verney. His name does not occur in the Commonwealth War Graves Commission list of names of those killed. The nearest name that fits (and the only Verney listed) is a Corporal Edgar Verney (note the promotion) who died in Malta and is buried in the Capuccini Naval Cemetery there. Is that the man, and is his name is wrongly inscribed on our War Memorial? Any Info please to either Bill on 622512 or Roland Ware on 623123

Roland Ware

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## FROM THE TREASURER

Subscriptions for 2009 are now due, unchanged at £3.50, and £2.00 for OAPs.

A few members did not renew last year; if they fail to renew this year (forgetting 2008) I will assume they no longer wish to remain members, and hence will not receive a Newsletter in the summer.

Mary Underwood



This 18thC? Sketch was found in the County Records Office. It supposedly depicts an Amesbury scene. Can you identify the location and buildings? There are no prizes, but we really would like to know!

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## THE AMESBURY SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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