

Coddenham Village

History Club

Newsletter ~ September 2023

It's been a special year so far inasmuch as our programme has at last returned to what it was before the Covid Pandemic. Let's hope it lasts. Meetings are back in Haysel House and we were able to book a very enjoyable coach trip in July to the Sutton Hoo Replica Ship Workshop in Woodbridge with a lunch stop at The Cherry Tree on the way home. It was also lovely to visit Granary Crafts at Buxhall with their enormous collection of bygones and experience the delicious home-made cakes in the tea room.

The Tea Party in the Community Centre in July hosted by Ann and Roy Gudgin to celebrate 100 years of Roy's family owning the village shop, was a great success. The hall was bursting at the seams with many people meeting up with old friends and neighbours they hadn't seen for years. There was much interest in the history display as well. The afternoon Garden Tea Party at St Mary's hosted by Neil Baillie in August to mark the involvement of his family in the property since 1923 was also very much enjoyed. The Village Fete was often held there at St Mary's in days gone by.

Future Programme

Our first talk of the autumn is on Tuesday 19th September with an illustrated talk by Chris Parfitt entitled "Portrait of a Suffolk River". The River Alde is now mainly an area for pleasure sailing but in Tudor times it served as a river where ships were launched to fight against the Spanish Armada. It will be interesting to find out more about this lovely river which passes by Snape and Aldeburgh on its way to Orford and the North Sea.

On Tuesday 17th October we welcome back Dave Cummings, Chairman of the Ipswich & District Detector Club. In the past Dave has kept us up to date with his metal detecting finds of Roman and Saxon origin in and around Coddenham but this time it's about his finds from Gt Blakenham and the surrounding area. It was Dave who led us in 1987 to our Romano-British archaeological site in the village which we ended up digging for over 20 years (more of this later).

Our AGM is at 7pm on Thursday 16th November when the committee will be elected and the annual subscription fee fixed for coming year. The future programme will be discussed and we welcome any ideas for speakers or visits for next year. After the business of the meeting, at around 7.30pm, we have the pleasure of welcoming Professor Mark Bailey who will be telling us about "The Black Death in Suffolk". Mark is Professor of Late Medieval History at the University of East Anglia and President of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and History. He has written numerous books on medieval history. As this is the last talk of the year, refreshments will be mulled wine and mince pies!

John Fulcher

It was with great sadness that we learned of John's passing. He had been unwell for some time and our sincere condolences are sent to his family.

John joined the history club in 1987 and soon became involved in all its activities. He had a strong interest in archaeology, having already worked as a volunteer on several archaeological sites across the county, so he was first on the scene when we began excavations at Valley Farm in the summer of 1988. For the next 22 years he led a small team of 'diggers' most weekends, winter and summer, come rain, hail or shine! Enthusiastic club members as well as the occasional students were greatly inspired by his enthusiasm and dedication. In 2010 he decided to call it a day and, together with Steffin Sokanovic, closed down the site.

The magnitude of 'finds' from the site is quite overwhelming. John has meticulously recorded everything from the smallest piece of metal or pot to the largest piece of flagon or Samian Ware. He photographed and even analysed soil samples. We intend to have a permanent display in the village of the most interesting artifacts and pottery once everything has been processed by the Suffolk Archaeology Service.

The excavations at Valley Farm were probably one of the largest projects the history club has ever undertaken, certainly the longest, and this would not have happened without the permission and support of the Cousens Family and the dedication and leadership of John Fulcher.

This is the story of our Romano-British Farmstead

For many years it had been known that buildings from the Roman Era once existed in Coddenham. The presence of Roman brick and tile in the fabric of the church is proof of this. Two large Roman forts once stood by the ford near Baylham Mill at Coddenham (known as Combretovium), so it is believed that the majority of the parish and surrounding area was occupied by the Romans from their invasion in AD43 to the departure of their armies in the 5th Century.

In 1987, Dave Cummings, who had been metal detecting fields belonging to Valley Farm, told us that he believed there had been considerable Roman occupation in one of the fields due to the amount of Roman pottery sherds lying around. It was in this knowledge that the history club 'field-walked', discovering an area rich in pottery sherds and with the willing co-operation of the landowners, the Cousens Family, digging began in the summer of 1988.

The club had already had a little bit of experience of archaeological excavating under the leadership of Donald Burton when digging in the old cottage garden behind the garage site in School Road the previous year. We were hoping to find evidence of the Roman Road (Margery Ref.346 running between the Iron Age settlement of Combretovium at Coddendam and the east coast) that was known to run close to that point. Sadly, there was no sign of the road but two rubbish pits were discovered containing old bottles and the remains of some excellent cowboy boots stamped "Made in Canada". There were a few 18th & 19th Century pottery sherds but nothing of great age. However, the star attraction was the excavation of the foundation of the old privy for the cottage which had since collapsed. It was all great fun for adults and children alike and, although we didn't realise it at the time, good groundwork for our next project.

Early in the excavations at Valley Farm in 1988 the remains of a flint stone wall was uncovered but was thought originally to be post-Roman, probably 5th or 6th Century. However, several Roman pottery sherds were discovered including fragments of Samian Ware and small pieces of Roman glass. Several pieces of Roman brick and tile were found and masses of nails! Part of a small bronze medicine spatula, a fibula brooch and a Sestertius coin of the Roman Emperor Commodus, AD180-192. We couldn't believe our luck. We were now under the leadership of John Fulcher, who took over from Donald.

The following year, 1989, we excavated further up the field and uncovered what appeared to be a boundary ditch. A great deal more pottery was found, including a flagon neck complete with handle, and enough of one storage pot to re-build it all but a few small pieces. We continued to excavate the ditch during the winter months and in the summer of 1990 we had the marvellous luck of finding a complete bowl, Gallo-Belgic dated AD40-60. Nearby, we found our first rather touching, tangible remains of the people who probably dug the ditches and used the pottery when new. It was a baby of a few months, laid somewhat carelessly in a narrow grave. Feet to the west with one tiny arm spread across the chest and a spread of tiny finger bones among the nest of curved ribs.

Continuing to excavate the ditch and turning two corners, we made our way back down the field again. In places the ditch was heavily strewn with animal bones and mounting amounts of Roman pottery. Brick tile fragments, heating flue box-tile and tesserae showed up together with nails and pieces of bronze, the odd coin or two and iron implements. We even found a bone needle in perfect condition. When we were on our way back down the field in an easterly direction, we discovered some large post holes together with a causeway across the ditch. We had found the entrance to the enclosure! In

this area we unearthed an iron door key and scythe. Interestingly, under the Roman working surface we found pottery dating to the Bronze Age. As well as this, over the course of the excavations, we had often discovered worked flints of varying dates – Stone Age to Iron Age. We carried on excavating the ditch until we reached the modern ditch boundary and could go no further.

Returning to our original site area – the one with the flint wall – we now knew that it was certainly not post-Roman but contemporary with the ditches. We excavated the wall further and discovered it extended into the next field through the modern ditch. Excavations around this area produced a large amount of smelting slag, part of a crucible and a bronze pin head (unfinished). We presume these were the remains of bronze and iron working furnaces.

Digging further inside the ditch enclosure we discovered more evidence of iron smelting. Of special interest were several chisel ends, used in metal working and blacksmithing; an iron needle and a well preserved writing stylus, implying the occupants were literate. And then, just as we were deciding to close down the site in 2009, there was the long awaited fairy tale find, the icing on our twenty years of digging – an early mid 2nd Century Roman Pottery Kiln.

Well over 150 coins had been unearthed from this site and adjacent area dating from the 1st Century to the 5th and, according to the analysis of pollen samples to date, the site population were growing crops in the surrounding fields to support this small industrial based society. Tim Dennis, a lecturer at Colchester University, did a magnetometer survey over much of the site, but no building appeared, so where the building debris (brick, roof tile, tesserae, hypocaust tile) came from is still a mystery!

Recollections

The following recollections are on the theme of transport in the village in days gone by. Arthur Smith lived in Coddendam as a young man in the 1920's. He married Mary, the daughter of Tel Offord the Blacksmith, and they lived in the village for the rest of their lives together.

“I remember travelling to Ipswich in the carrier's cart, a covered wagon drawn by a horse. We used to leave Crown Corner around 9 o'clock and go up to Barham Corner, Claydon and Whitton Hill. The carrier used to have people waiting on the side of the road with various requests, and we'd get to Ipswich about 11. Coming home we'd leave from outside the Half Moon Star on the Barrack Corner near the Presbyterian Church, and we were lucky to get home by 6 o'clock. Kids always sat on their mum's laps in the wagon, but sometimes we'd get up front where the driver was sitting. Mr Buckle was his name.

In the 1920's Mr Bickers came on the scene with his Reliant buses, which carried 20 or so. Another gent from Hemingstone who'd had a horse and cart purchased a bus, and the

passengers used to get in at the rear, up three steps – it was a peculiar bus with a crank up the side. He'd call at Mr Fiske's and all the shops in Coddendam to see if they wanted anything from Ipswich. One day, he picked up a passenger at the church – she was the only one that day- so she got in the back of the bus and off they sped to Ipswich. When they got there he went to the back to let her out, and behold she weren't there! After some hasty searching he realised that when he went to change gear up Lodge Hill he'd kangarooed a bit, and she'd slipped off the back seat and out of the bus. Luckily she wasn't hurt and had gone on home.

Bickers Buses left for Ipswich at 10 o'clock and 2 o'clock, and on a Saturday night there was an extra one in at 5, and the last one out at 9. When it was time to come back from Ipswich he'd always ask if everyone was on the bus, and if not they'd send someone to look up the road to see if anyone else was coming.

As we got older some of us had motorbikes – I had a Model P Triumph 3 ½ hp. I bought it in a shop in Princes Street on a Saturday afternoon. The salesman said, “Get on the back”, and took me off for a drive round to show me the throttle, etc. I paid £65 for it, that was in 1928, and drove it straight home, no test or anything! There were scores of motorbikes in my era, and we used to congregate on Crown Corner. There was no excess of noise because we knew how to conduct ourselves, also we were afraid of the village PC who was always lurking around. He'd use his gloves round our ears, or his foot, and it did us a world of good. I'd go up to Ipswich sometimes with one lad on the back, and pick up another in town and bring two back on the pillion. We never drove under the influence in those days, we just never did. One Sunday I drove Leslie Lockwood and his sister Queenie round Norfolk, both on the back of the bike. There was no traffic, and you seldom used your hooter.”

Arthur Smith – June 1987

Diary Dates

Tuesday 19th Sept: “Portrait of a Suffolk River” by Chris Parfitt. 7.30pm Haysel House

Tuesday 17th Oct: “Metal Detecting Finds from Gt Blakenham & Surrounding Area” by
Dave Cummings. 7.30pm Haysel House

Thursday 16th Nov: AGM at 7pm followed by “The Black Death in Suffolk” by
Professor Mark Bailey at 7.30pm. Haysel House

Meetings are free to members, visitors £3

Working Meetings

These meetings are held from 7.30 – 9pm at Ivy Farm House, High Street, Coddendam,

where our records are kept. It is for anyone wishing to research or just browse through the material we have collected over the years. If you are unable to make any of these evenings please contact Sylvia Bickers 01449 760382 for a mutually suitable date and time.

Monday 25th September

Monday 30th October

Monday 27th November

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