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Yatton Congresbury Claverham and Cleeve Archaeological Research Team

Newsletter June 2023

Chairman's chat

Geophysical surveying has been an irregular activity this year with a very wet March /April with rain stopping play most weeks. Now the grass is so long so we cannot lay tapes until they cut it for hay. In other pastures there so little grass we are waiting for cattle and sheep to be moved so we can move in. Hopefully, in the next week the grass at Kingston Seymour will be cut and the promise of some rain will encourage the grass to grow at Westbury-sub-Mendip and the cattle can be moved. The excavation of a Romano-British farmstead at Westbury-sub-Mendip is impressive. We have been invited by the Westbury Society Archaeology Group to survey some of the wider landscape around the dig site. We hope this gradiometry survey will provide more information to tell the story of this site, but it is likely to pose even more questions to be answered. Arthur

An introduction to studying place-names (with local examples)

Place names are eternally fascinating: they can be ancient in origin, like the Kenn (River) (*probably from Old British caint – modern Welsh spelling: we don't know exactly how it was spelt, because in pre-literate times it was never written down*) meaning 'the winding one' to Pylon Ground (*meaning obvious, and modern English that is unlikely to predate c1950*). There is, however, the potential for pratfalls aplenty in the study for the unwary.

Place names are workaday, slippery, changeable, subject to illiterate interference by planners, argued over by academics, often referring to agricultural practices or crops that have long disappeared, frequently sarcastic or even bawdy, or refer to medieval understanding of archaeological sites we now understand differently.

Ask why place-names are necessary, what function they serve? To be unequivocal is one reason: 'Today, plough Eleven Acres' is a disaster if misunderstood as 'plough Seven Acres' as you might imagine a perhaps sleepy, overhung peasant ploughman listening to the reeve issuing instructions for the day at some ridiculous o'clock dawn time deep in the middle ages. Or for a modern issue, remember the van driver I worked with who took a vanload of foodstuffs to a pub in Beaminster in Dorset, rather than the intended Bedminster in Bristol, because both names are pronounced almost identically in Somerset vernacular, and his instructions weren't clear enough.

Some grasp of the source languages from which names are derived is necessary for full understanding, as is the changes that have occurred in recorded history, for example the consonantal shift that means Geoffrey Chaucer referred to 'briddes' (herken how ye blissful briddes sing!) whereas we talk about 'birds'. This change, incidentally, has led to much confusion: Banwell has its 'Bridewell' (*probably 'spring notably frequented by birds' and nothing to do with pagan rites!*) and Long Ashton its 'Bird's Well': the surviving names come one from before the medieval shift, and one after.

So to get very far in research, you will need a reasonable working knowledge of Old, Middle and Modern English; at least an acquaintance with Welsh/Cornish; some knowledge of Latin and medieval French. A working knowledge of Somerset vernacular (because it is very close to Old English), traditional plant names and pre-mechanised agriculture is helpful.

This sounds far more scary than it needs to be: most place-names in Somerset are derived from Old English: 'Celtic' (pre-English) names tend mainly to survive in mega-topographical features like rivers and hills, Latin is usually obvious dog-Latin imposed in the middle ages (Weston-super-Mare, as opposed to Burnham-on-Sea), French is often garbled Norman French, from Normans stealing land as a result of the 11th century invasion of England, especially family names (Shepton Mallet, Norton Malreward). Some manorial names of this type (Cheddar Fitzwater, Norton Beauchamp (in Kewstoke)) are necessary for historical studies, but functionally extinct.

Place names can, of course, apply to all manner of areas, from a great city like Bristol (probably 'brycg-stow' 'the place of the bridge'), to a village like Congresbury (probably Cungar ys burh, 'the minster of St Congar' – the original saint's name was Welsh, of course, and rendered 'Cyngar'), Yatton (probably 'gat-tun' 'the gate, or access, settlement' (*the Old English letter 'g' pronounced like modern 'y-' in most cases*): here you need to appreciate the local topography, the slightly raised Mercia Mudstone and glacial Head peninsula on which Yatton village is built giving dry access to the important rich grazing of the Northmarsh on each side), or a local field called Ash Field, which believe it or not, is characterised by ash trees: many field names are just so undramatic and workaday: sometimes they are also long-lasting: the name 'Horseleaze' ('pasture used for horses') at Kingston Seymour is at least 500 years old; 'Garston' ('the grass enclosure') at Cheddar, by the Gorge, is first recorded in the early 13th century.

And probably the most important of all: get your earliest version available. There is a field at Cheddar called 'Twenty Wills' on the Tithe map of 1840. After some study of place

names, I realised this was probably a name referring to the fertility of the soil (twenty times as good as normal). It wasn't until I found a 1565 reference to the name as 'twentioells' that I realised that the field lies between two active streams ('well' in Old English) and the name is simply the descriptive '(be)etween two wells', Middle English for '(field) between two active streams': as such streams are fairly rare on the lower slopes of Mendip, this feature would have stood out enough to be the foundation of the name.

And always remember, most placenames were provided by people who actually lived and farmed in and around them, and so are severely practical: your 'One Acre's and your 'Poor Ground's far outnumber your more exotic 'Chapel Field's and 'goldhorde's: but isn't that just life?

Next time: *Your local river's name: an Old British legacy for the English, and some useful references and cribs.*

Vince

A week in Rome

So you've done the Forum, mingled with the crowds at the Colosseum and strained your neck looking at the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. You've climbed the Spanish Steps and thrown a coin into the Trevi Fountain- so what's left to do?



Well there are lots of places to visit in Rome where you won't get crushed by the onslaught of large groups of tourists and where it's still possible to imagine the city as it was, namely the Baths of Caracalla and the Ara Pacis. Neither of them are tucked away, indeed the baths are not that far from the Circus Maximus and the Colosseum whilst Augustus's magnificent altar sits in a glass box just a hop and a skip from the Pantheon; but very few people visit either of them.



The Baths date from 212-216AD when the Emperor Caracalla (the nickname of Marcus Aurelius Antoninus) dedicated its central building and were in use until the 530s when invading Goths cut off its water supply .

In their day the numerous rooms, swimming pools and gymnasiums could accommodate up to 1,600 bathers and covered a vast area. Although little remains now of the interior, the height and thickness of the walls and the intricately patterned mosaics, are testament to the size and grandeur of the place.



This was a substantial complex of over 60 acres and had all the usual features of a bath house including two public libraries, shops and brothels. It's safe to say that these baths were for more than just keeping clean.

The Ara Pacis or Altar of Peace was built for the Emperor Augustus (27 BCE-14AD) to honour his great 'peace-keeping' mission in Spain and Gaul. It was dedicated to Pax, the Roman Goddess of peace in 9BCE, on the birthday of his wife Livia- more about her later.

Built of white Carrara marble and decorated with beautifully carved side panels the Ara Pacis is essentially a box within a box. The whole structure is set on a podium, accessed through two large doors whilst the altar is also raised up further flights.



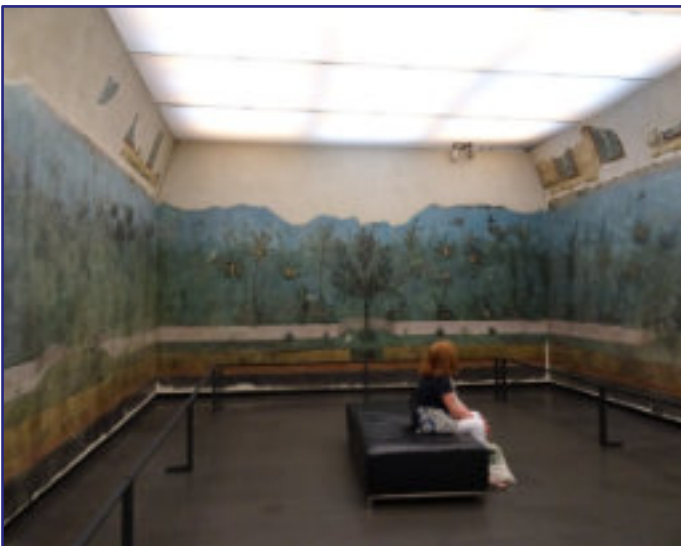
Also in this museum is the bronze statue known as the Boxer which was discovered in 1865 and may once have been sited in the Baths of Constantine. This more than life size figure was cast in separate parts using the lost wax method. These were then welded together and fine details added using copper and a darker coloured bronze.



Visitors to Rome appear to shun its major museums, which is a great pity as they are full of the most incredible sculptures and art-works.

In The Palazzo Massimo alle Terme there is a room devoted entirely to the frescoes which once adorned the winter dining room in the villa of Augustus's wife, Livia. Here you can sit surrounded by scenes of a painted garden of exotic trees, flowers and birds all set against a backdrop of a bright blue sky.

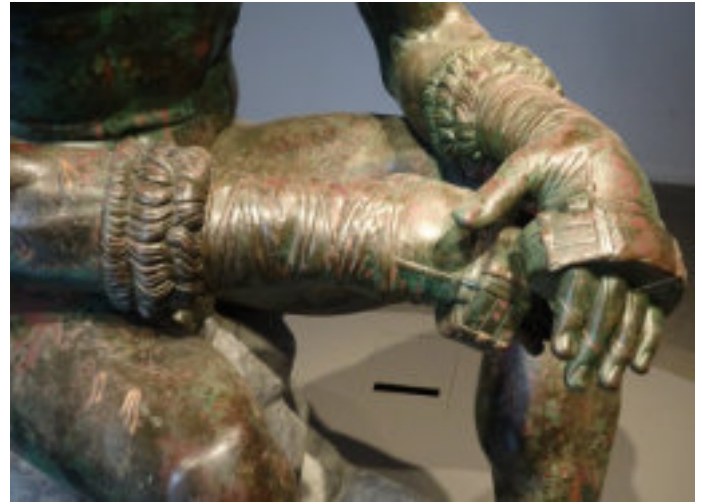
The frescoes were discovered during excavations in 1863 and then removed to their position in the 1950s and they should not be missed.



The eyes would have been made of glass, ivory or marble similar in style to this one.

In my opinion this is one of the finest bronzes ever created, not just for the craftsmanship which went into its creation but the noble dignity which it portrays. This is no lithe Adonis but a real man who has taken part in many bouts, as can be seen by the wounds to his head, both historical and as recent as his latest encounter.

Janet Dickson



The caestus (boxing gloves) were padded, leather bands with metal inserts.

Breaking news - Plague is found on Mendip!!

The oldest evidence for the plague in Britain has been discovered in 4,000-year-old human remains unearthed at bronze age burial sites in Cumbria and **Somerset**.

Traces of *Yersinia pestis* bacteria were found in the teeth of individuals at the Levens Park ring cairn monument near Kendal, and **Charterhouse Warren in the Mendips**, a site where at least 40 men, women and children were buried, dismembered, in a natural shaft.



The shaft at the Charterhouse Warren site, 1972, where the remains of at least 40 people were found.

“This is the earliest plague found in Britain,” said Pooja Swali, first author on the study in *Nature Communications* and a PhD student at the Francis Crick Institute in London. Evidence for the ancient outbreak emerged when Swali and her colleagues screened DNA lurking in the dental pulp of teeth taken from 34 skeletons from the two burial sites.

Material from one woman, between 35 and 45 years old, buried at the Cumbrian monument tested positive for plague bacteria, along with two children, aged 10 to 12, at Charterhouse Warren.

The disease that reached Britain 4,000 years ago was probably the pneumonic form of plague, which causes fever, headache, weakness and pneumonia as the bacteria take hold in the lungs. According to documented cases in Europe, pneumonic plague could spread from a single hunter or herder to an entire community within days.

Dr Pontus Skoglund, another co-author and head of the ancient genomics lab at the Crick, said ancient DNA can help identify and reconstruct outbreaks of infectious disease that would otherwise remain unknown. “The only way we know about this one is through DNA. We would have no idea there was *Yersinia pestis* around otherwise,” he said.

(Edited version of an article which appeared in *The Guardian*, May 30th 2023.)

Janet Dickson

Update of prices for YCCART "Uniform"

Cap £7,10 + VAT

Sky Blue Polo £16,70 + VAT

Fleece (Navy) £21.00 + VAT

All have our usual logo back & front as before

No time restriction as the embroidery is logged onto Conceptwears equipment. Please contact John Wilcox

Caption Competition

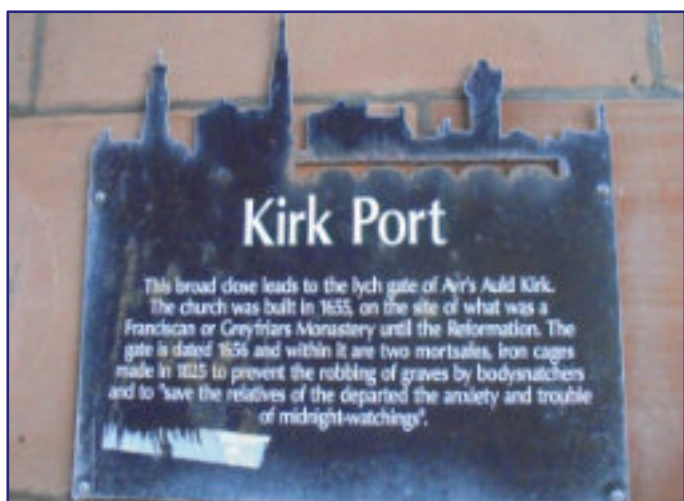
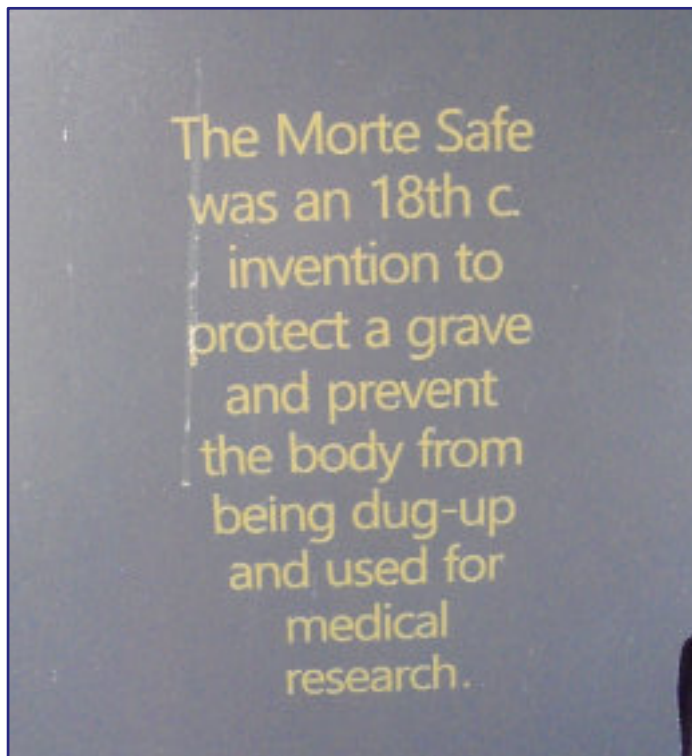
While we were having coffee in June this lonely fly landed on Vince's hand and just didn't move for the next 15 minutes of so - it seemed quite content. We were all quite amused. A free coffee and biscuits for the best caption. Email captions to Arthur - judge's decision is final.



Mort Safes

On recent trips to Scotland I have seen various ways of deterring 'Body Snatchers'.

At Callander, (where the original 'Dr Finlay's Casebook' was filmed) a watch tower had been built into the cemetery wall. A night watchman was employed to guard the graves.



On a visit to Ayr this year, 'technology' had moved on with the use of Mort Safes. These were metal rims attached to the closed coffins before burial. So not only did you need to dig up the coffin, it then had to be wrenched open, probably not the quietest of jobs!

Even then a single rim was added to, when a bar was attached across the coffin. The plaque on the church gate wall says 'this would give grieving relatives peace of mind.'(!!)

Philippa Cormack



Dates for your Diary

YCCCART Social Evening members + I

Mendip Spring Golf Club

Friday November 10th - 7.00 p.m. for 7.30 p.m.

Details including finalised menu to follow.

The walnut tree and the Northmarsh

We don't value walnuts any more: give your punter a bag of cashews or macadamia nuts and they are happy. And there is absolutely nothing wrong with those estimable products of foreign parts.



But consider the humble walnut (or bannut tree, as often called in Somerset). It was traditional to always have at least one walnut tree in every orchard, and there were (and are) many orchards in the Northmarsh. The tree provides mature walnuts to be cracked at Christmas (if the rooks don't get them first), but much better, it provides the green unripe nuts, coming into their own as we speak. Stab a couple in the field, to make certain the shells are not developing yet: should be OK before mid-June.

Pickled, or made into ketchup, these will not only provide a nourishing and intriguing tasty treat, but will keep without freezing for years. Remember that time not too long ago when everyone spent time from June to October pickling, jamming, drying, fermenting and otherwise preparing against the cold months to come (well, we did on our farm).

So a couple of recipes for these amazing free gifts: Pickled walnuts (recipe taught me by my gran) and ketchup (from an 1827 Clevedon book of recipes from the Kenn village web site).



Pick as many walnuts as you want to pickle (or can find). Take them home, pick out leaves and stalks, then stab each nut all over with a non-reactive fork (traditionally, silver; but today, stainless steel). Note the warning re the staining properties of the juice below. Beware commercial pickled walnuts: incredibly expensive, and horrendously sweet.

Make up a strong salt solution (as strong as you can make it) and soak the nuts in it for a week. Drain, and set out in the sun for two or three days until blackening. Repeat. Then wash all the salt off, and drown the nuts in vinegar. Malt vinegar is a bit

harsh: I generally use cider vinegar, or a half-and-half mixture. For a modern touch, experiment with chili, garlic or spices in the jar. Bottle up, and leave for three months at least.

The pickled nuts (I won't lie to you) have a strange texture which some really don't like. They are excellent as a pickle with anything traditionally used as such, especially cheese or cold meat. But try chopping into stews (carnivore or vegan) for an unusual extra zing. When you've eaten all the nuts, don't throw the nutty vinegar away: it's great with scrambled eggs. And with home made cheese and wild garlic scones, the nuts are a treat fit for our king!

Walnut ketchup 1827 (Clevedon recipe)

I found the original recipe ('One hundredweight of walnuts, one gallon of port') and cut it down for modern use. This one works. (<https://kennvillage.co.uk/home-2/history-project/>)

Ingredients

About 50-80 green walnuts (depends on size)
3 tablespoons sea salt
About 200ml cider vinegar (adjust to taste)
50g of anchovies, rinsed well
1 large onion, chopped
1 large wineglass port (the best you can afford)
1 teaspoon ground nutmeg
2 teaspoons ground black pepper
1 teaspoon cayenne
6 crushed cloves (or teaspoon of powdered)
3cm chopped or grated horseradish
A 1-inch piece of ginger, unpeeled and sliced thin
2 finely chopped red chillies (seeds optional)
Thickener (like cornflour or gelatin) (optional)

Chop your walnuts finely. This is a messy job, the juice squirts, and the liquid will stain everything (including your skin) dark brown. Wear gloves and an old long-sleeved shirt: chop the walnuts with a stainless steel knife on a plastic cutting board.

Put the walnuts in a large glass jar and barely cover them with the vinegar. If you need a bit more, just add it. Put the lid on the container and let this sit at room temperature on a sunny windowsill for a week. Shake at least once a day.

After a week, move the walnuts and vinegar into a large, non-reactive saucepan and add the remaining ingredients. Simmer for 45 minutes, then strain through a fine-mesh (plastic) sieve to separate the solids. Or don't: it's up to you. You can wait until the sauce cools and then buzz it in a blender with cornflour; this will keep the very fine solids suspended in the ketchup and give you a sauce with more body, but it is less traditional. Bottle the sauce in sterilised jars and keep it in a cool, dark place indefinitely.

This will make about three honey jars of ketchup. It doesn't sound like much, but you only use it in smallish quantities. It has a nutty, umami, 'adult' very slightly bitter taste, with hits of all the spices. Any spices you don't like: just leave them out. Great with cold meat, on toast snacks, bean salads etc.

Vince the (fortunately) not-so-Naked Chef.