

Wye Historical Society



Wye Agricultural Museum, Brook

Newsletter August 2021

Society Matters

I'm delighted to inform members that we will be meeting in the large Hall of the Lady Joanna Thornhill School for our 2021/22 season. This will give us more space for seating.

Our programme for this coming season is as follows;-

October 6 th .	A Spitfire Girl	Melody Foreman
November 3 rd .	A History of Zoos	Prof. Richard Griffiths
December 1 st .	Rupert, the Anthropomorphic Bear	Howard Smith
January 5 th .	Members Evening	
February 2 nd .	T.B.C.	
March 2 nd .	Kent & Turkish Piracy in the 17 th . C	Prof. Jackie Eales
April 6 th .	Three Castles & an Ironmaster's House	David Clarke

Full details will be provided when membership is renewed.

Our AGM was sadly held as a Zoom meeting on 28th. April 2021 and a new committee was elected.

President	Revd. John Makey
Chairman	Tim Betts
Secretary	Jonathan Timms
Treasurer	Anna Clark
Archivist	Maureen de Saxe
Web Master	Ellie Morris
Programmes	Rosie Fletcher
	Cilla Deeks
	Paul Burnham
	Margaret Bray

DISCOVERING ROMAN WYE

The earliest period during which we know that a settlement existed on the site of the village of Wye was when 'Britannia' was part of the Roman Empire. It was not focussed on Bridge Street and Church Street, as was Wye during the Middle Ages, but was on the flat area now occupied by the 1960s development of Churchfield Way, Abbots Walk and The Forstal. Roman occupation was first investigated by Donald Kay in 1948, who noticed pottery and tiles on the high ground between what is now 29 Churchfield Way and Bridge Street. This was called Bolts Hill, a name which implies there was once a significant building on it. The building may well have been the pre-Christian shrine implied by the name of Wye, which means a holy place. It was indeed the site of the church of Saxon times, whose graveyard extended across ground which is now allotments and gardens as far as the footpath. This is believed to have replaced the pre-Christian shrine, which could possibly have originated in Roman times, or even before. The Saxon church was replaced by the present church building on a new site in 1292.

Donald Kay obtained permission to dig a series of trenches and found over a hundred pottery fragments of types suggesting occupation right through the Roman period from the first to the fourth centuries. He also found many meat bones, some small iron objects, mostly nails, and eleven pieces of tile, including roof and flue tiles. He found two Roman coins, of Antoninus Pius (AD 138-161) and Carausius (AD 287-293).



Antoninus coin



Carausius coin

During the 1960s the Churchfield Estate was built, but, surprisingly, no archaeological discoveries were reported. However, Roman coins have been found in gardens. One of Nero (AD 54-68) was found in the garden of Holly House on the north side of Bridge Street and one of Constantius II (AD 331-361) in a garden on the north side of Churchfield Way. A coin of Constantine I of the London mint (c. 310) was found in a garden of Abbots Walk, and an unspecified Roman coin came from one in The Forstal. These finds suggest that the

settlement covered most of the area of the present Churchfield estate and continued in use from the first century to the fourth.

In July 1999 twelve fragments of Roman tile were found in a gas pipe trench in the grass verge beside Churchfield Way outside nos. 70-72. Finding tiles in only two places suggests that most of the buildings in the settlement were of wood with thatched roofs. The excavation of part of a Roman settlement at Westhawk Farm, south of Ashford, enables the probable appearance of the Roman settlement at Wye to be envisaged. There were about equal numbers of circular and rectangular buildings. The roundhouses were like many in Africa today. They were typically about ten metres in diameter with a thatched roof, supported by poles. The walls were of wattle and daub, supported by stakes. The rectangular buildings had stout posts embedded in the ground, supporting a wooden frame with mortice and tenon joints. Generally, they were also thatched, although finds of loose tiles suggested that, as at Wye, there were some with tiled roofs.



Constantius coin



Nero coin

In both settlements buildings with solid walls on stone or brick foundations were few. In Wye there are signs on an air photograph that there might have been one on what is now the western side of Churchfield Green, and it is hoped to investigate this by geophysical survey. But the big house, such as is given the name of 'villa', was elsewhere, probably on Harville Farm, where Roman buildings were partly excavated in 1970-73.

Sadly, the two weeks of excavations there planned by Paul Wilkinson and students at the Kent Archaeological Field School have been cancelled due to COVID, and I am unable to do any laborious field work myself due to illness. However, I would like to hear from any resident on the Churchfield estate who finds tiles or unglazed pottery sherds which are not obviously modern. There are people who could investigate this, and I could also arrange for a metal detector sweep of the garden for anyone who is interested in seeking Roman coins.

PAUL BURNHAM (mpburnham@btinternet.com).

PANDEMICS IN THE PAST

This was generally true as well during the Great Plague which struck London (and to a lesser extent the home counties) in 1665. Daniel Defoe was a small child at the time, but in 1722 he published the fascinating ‘memoirs’ of a Londoner referred to as ‘H.F.’ – quite possibly his uncle Henry Foe who would have been aged thirty-seven at the time. Defoe’s *A Journal of the Plague Year* is his own imaginative reconstruction of events, which includes numerous glimpses of how London’s churches and meeting houses responded to the crisis (Defoe himself – unlike his uncle – was a Dissenter who had once considered becoming an ordained minister). Several extracts from the Journal now follow, tracing the Plague’s development. One beneficial outcome was that the many ‘unhappy breaches in matters of religion’ were temporarily forgotten, with Anglicans, Presbyterians and Independent Dissenters working for the common good:

The visitation reconciled them again, at least for a time, and many of the best and most valuable ministers and preachers of the Dissenters were suffered to go into the churches where the incumbents were fled away, as many were, not being able to stand it; and the people flocked without distinction to hear them preach, not much inquiring who or what opinion they were of.

H.F., however, being a religious man was certainly not impressed by the behaviour of ‘a dreadful set of fellows’ who frequented a local tavern every night:

That which was the worst in all their devilish language was, that they were not afraid to blaspheme God and talk atheistically, making a jest of my calling the plague the hand of God; mocking, and even laughing, at the word judgement, as if the providence of God had no concern in the inflicting such a desolating stroke; and that the people calling upon God as they saw the carts carrying away the dead bodies was all enthusiastic, absurd, and impertinent. I made them some reply, such as I thought proper, but which I found was so far from putting a check to their horrid way of speaking that it made them rail the more, so that I confess it filled me with horror and a kind of rage.

He mentions a certain ‘famous Solomon Eagle’, an over-enthusiastic clergyman of a distinctly contrary opinion to the revellers:

He, though not infected at all but in his head, went about denouncing of judgement upon the city in a frightful manner, sometimes quite naked, and with a pan of burning charcoal on his head. What he said, or pretended, indeed I could not learn. I will not say whether that clergyman was distracted or not, or whether he did it in pure zeal for the poor people, who went every evening through the streets of Whitechapel, and, with his hands lifted up, repeated that part of the Liturgy of the Church continually, ‘Spare us, good Lord; spare Thy people, whom Thou has redeemed with Thy most precious blood.’

Not a few of the population (as well as some clergy) fled the city, heading (for example) 'to Wapping, Ratcliff, Limehouse, Poplar, and such places'¹:



And it is not at all unlikely that their doing this helped to bring the plague that way faster than it might otherwise have come. For though I am much for people flying away and emptying such a town as this upon the first appearance of a like visitation, and that all people who have any possible retreat should make use of it in time and be gone, yet I must say, when all that will fly are gone, those that are left and must stand it should stand stock-still where they are, and not shift from one end of the town or one part of the town to the other; for that is the bane and mischief of the whole, and they carry the plague from house to house in their very clothes. Wherefore were we ordered to kill all the dogs and cats, but because as they were domestic animals, and are apt to run from house to house and from street to street, so they are capable of carrying the effluvia or infectious streams of bodies infected even in their furs and hair.

Yet there was a reluctance among some to admit that any contagion had actually reached their dwelling:

As it was of the utmost consequence to families not to be known to be infected, if it was possible to avoid it, so they took all the measures they could to have it not believed, and

¹ Defoe's only reference to Kent mentions the increased shipments through the ports of Faversham and Margate, resulting from the crippling of London's own docks.

if any died in their houses, to get them returned to the examiners, and by the searchers, as having died of other distempers.

H.F. points out that some of those infected might well have been (in modern terminology) 'asymptomatic':

Yet the infection is retained in bodies apparently well, and conveyed from them to those they converse with, while it is known to neither the one nor the other. Great were the confusions at that time upon this very account, and when people began to be convinced that the infection was received in this surprising manner from persons apparently well, they began to be exceeding shy and jealous of every one that came near them. Once, on a public day, whether a Sabbath-day or not I do not remember, in Aldgate Church, in a pew full of people, on a sudden one fancied she smelt an ill smell. Immediately she fancies the plague was in the pew, whispers her notion or suspicion to the next, then rises and goes out of the pew. It immediately took with the next, and so to them all; and every one of them, and of the two or three adjoining pews, got up and went out of the church, nobody knowing what it was that offended them, or from whom.

As panic set in, 'the old women' to whom people turned gave advice on preventative measures:

This immediately filled everybody's mouths with one preparation or other, such as the old women directed, and some perhaps as physicians directed, in order to prevent infection by the breath of others; insomuch that if we came to go into a church when it was anything full of people, there would be such a mixture of smells at the entrance that it was much more strong, though perhaps not so wholesome, than if you were going into an apothecary's or druggist's shop. In a word, the whole church was like a smelling-bottle; in one corner it was all perfumes; in another, aromatics, balsamics, and variety of drugs and herbs; in another, salts and spirits, as everyone was furnished for their own preservation. Yet I observed that after people were possessed, as I have said, with the belief, or rather assurance, of the infection being thus carried on by persons apparently in health, the churches and meetinghouses were much thinner of people than at other times before that they used to be. For this is to be said of the people of London, that during the whole time of the pestilence the churches or meetings were never wholly shut up, nor did the people decline coming out to the public worship of God, except only in some parishes when the violence of the distemper was more particularly in that parish at that time, and even then, no longer than it continued to be so.

H.F. goes on to testify to the amazing 'charitable assistance that some pious people daily gave' to alleviate 'the misery of the poor' ...

... sending them relief and supplies both of food, physic, and other help, as they found they wanted; and indeed it is a debt of justice due to the temper of the people of that day to take notice here, that not only great sums, very great sums of money were

charitably sent to the Lord Mayor and aldermen for the assistance and support of the poor distempered people, but abundance of private people daily distributed large sums of money for their relief, and sent people about to inquire into the condition of particular distressed and visited families, and relieved them; nay, some pious ladies were so transported with zeal in so good a work, and so confident in the protection of Providence in discharge of the great duty of charity, that they went about in person distributing alms to the poor, and even visiting poor families, though sick and infected, in their very houses, appointing nurses to attend those that wanted attending, and ordering apothecaries and surgeons, the first to supply them with drugs or plasters, and such things as they wanted; and the last to lance and dress the swellings and tumours, where such were wanting; giving their blessing to the poor in substantial relief to them, as well as hearty prayers for them.



Later on in the year, as (again in modern usage) the ‘R’ number was declining, there were those who abandoned their previous caution – resulting of course in a surge of infections:

They took to such a precipitant courage and grew so entirely regardless of themselves and of the infection, that they made no more of the plague than of an ordinary fever, nor indeed so much. They not only went boldly into company with those who had tumours and carbuncles upon them that were running, and consequently contagious, but ate and drank with them, nay, into their houses to visit them, and even, as I was told, into their very chambers where they lay sick.

... The physicians opposed this thoughtless humour of the people with all their might, and gave out printed directions, spreading them all over the city and suburbs, advising the people to continue reserved, and to use still the utmost caution in their ordinary conduct, notwithstanding the decrease of the distemper, terrifying them with the danger of bringing a relapse upon the whole city, and telling them how such a relapse might be more fatal and dangerous than the whole visitation that had been already; with many arguments and reasons to explain and prove that part to them, and which are too long to repeat here.

... This rash and foolish conduct, I say, of the people went so far that the ministers took notice to them of it at last and laid before them both the folly and danger of it; and this checked it a little, so that they grew more cautious. But it had another effect, which they could not check; for as the first rumour had spread not over the city only, but into the country, it had the like effect: and the people were so tired with being so long from London, and so eager to come back, that they flocked to town without fear or forecast, and began to show themselves in the streets as if all the danger was over. It was indeed surprising to see it, for though there died still from 1000 to 1800 a week, yet the people flocked to town as if all had been well. The consequence of this was, that the bills increased again 400 the very first week in November; and if I might believe the physicians, there was above 3000 fell sick that week, most of them newcomers, too.

With hindsight, we might gently inform Daniel Defoe that many reckon the 21st century's Covid pandemic was actually much more devastating in its effects, despite the vast increase in medical knowledge since his time – but only time will tell whether the global outcome proves to be 'without parallel in history' (which in Defoe's terms would be a radical growth in mutual understanding and charitable concern). A hundred years ago, at the end of the First World War, the so-called Spanish Flu certainly seemed at the time to be the most damaging pandemic ever known, and the way it was treated brought responses that had not previously surfaced so strongly – yet have remained divisive. Thus, when a government order was issued in the United States in 1918 banning the use of churches and of any activities on church premises, there was much anger articulated by some Christian leaders. Ernest Smith, an Episcopalian, delivered a furious sermon 'The Closed Church Epidemic': in it he criticized the powers-that-be, arguing that the real epidemic was not the Spanish Flu but 'unreasonable fear' rooted in 'little faith' and 'imperfect information'. 'Those who feel that the churches must be closed because of the crowds which assemble there apparently know very little about churches', he said, since a church, unlike a movie theatre, is generally 'a safe place to avoid a crowd'. His main objection, however, was that churches were 'put into the class of non-essential industries ... on the same level as the poolrooms, saloons, movies'. In some places, he stated, they were even forced to close while saloons and liquor stores often remained open. For him and his kindred spirits it was a matter of human rights and the freedoms that were supposed to be enshrined in the American constitution. (In May 2020 a court case brought against the closure of churches successfully overruled the French government's legislation – on that occasion at least!)

Certainly, freedom of religion is not to be denied without compelling reasons. The issue at stake for Christians in any pandemic is to give proper weight to Jesus' own guidance, 'Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's'. In today's context this would require due concern for 'the common good' to which (hopefully) the lawful authority in any country is also committed. And we should be thankful that when draconian measures are imposed to protect the public, we also heed

the counsel embodied in the parable of the lost sheep: what is rightfully expected of the 'ninety and nine' may not always be appropriate for the *hundredth* member of the flock. Today we recognize that circumstances can vary, and the Pharisaic approach of 'one rule for all' may indeed sometimes need to be challenged.

Rodney Schofield

Fr Rodney Schofield will be giving a talk on 'The Medieval Wall Paintings' in St. Mary's Church, Brook on Thursday 25th November at 7.00pm.



Refreshments are provided

This will be a ticketed event with proceeds going to the Church.

Further details will be made available in September