

Clifton Antiquarian Club

Young Archaeologists at Bradford on Avon and Stoney Littleton



7th June 2015

Bradford on Avon

The last time our Young Archaeologists were together we were exploring the Saxon church at Escomb, County Durham, so it seemed suitable to reconvene at another rare example of an Anglo Saxon church. And so it was that we met on a very sunny Sunday morning in the wonderful Bradford on Avon.

The “broad ford” was the place that Saxons would drive their carts across the River Avon as they headed towards Bath, Bristol and the coast. At this time, and indeed in prehistoric times, the River Avon would have been an important route



and easily navigable. Bradford first enters the history books in the Anglo Saxon Chronicles entry for 652, noting a battle at the Broad Ford (Bradanforda Afene) between Cenwalh, King of Wessex, and unspecified opposition. It doesn't mention who won but the entries for 658 and 661 have Cenwalh in battle again.

The heroic historian, William of Malmesbury, writing in his *Gesta Pontificum* confirms that St. Laurence church was standing in the 1120's but tells us it dates back to 709 and dedicated to St. Aldhelm. The precise date of the present building remains a matter of some debate, but with our now expert knowledge of Anglo Saxon architecture, there are plenty of clues to its Anglo Saxon

origins. Our Young Archaeologists hunted these out - small windows, the height of the building in comparison to its length, long and short quoins. George set off enthusiastically in search of consecration crosses.

Inside, we tracked down, or rather up, the carved angels and above the alter, the remains of a stone cross, thought to have originally marked resting spots of St. Aldehelm during his journey to Bradford. The twisting ring is rather more contemporary, sculpted by John Maine in 2012. The central stone is actually a piece of fossilised tree that took this form around 150 million years ago. Craftily combined by John Maine, the three pieces represent the modernity and the antiquity of church (and planet) and most importantly, emphasised and complemented Áine's beautiful braided hair style for the day.



Áine at the alter, and searching for angels



The team outside St. Laurence's church, note also the clues to the sneaky participation of two members of the CAC Velocipede section

Back in the park, there was time to throw a rugby ball around and inspect the 13 century bridge, complete with an unusual lock up added in the 17th century.

John Leland during his perambulations of England between 1539 and 1543 visited Bradford in 1540. He noted that it had a good market every week and also the bridge, that “hath 9. fair arches of stone” He was right - we counted them, although only two are original 13th century.

Alas, there was no time to visit the tithe barn, or appreciate the other medieval characteristics of Bradford, we shall save these for a future visit.

Stoney Littleton Long Barrow

From Bradford it was time to step back a few years into the Neolithic and a visit to Stoney Littleton. This is a great site, a classic Cotswold Severn long barrow, a little reconstructed perhaps in antiquarian days, but nevertheless, a great site and perfect spot for a picnic.



The Young Archaeologists were sent in with torches to explore the chambers - three on each side, and issued with paper and clipboards to record interesting features.



Dylan and Áine hard at work

Hannah remembered the ammonite on the entrance orthostat and made a fine illustration to show her teacher - they have been studying fossils, and of course, some will remember our fossil hunting expedition at Lyme Regis last summer.



Hannah pointing out the ammonite

As we sat down to discuss the site, the topic of social complexities cropped up amongst the Young Archaeologists - these little chaps and chapesses are getting rather clever. This was particularly interesting as we had our China expert, H - J Colsten with us, and this idea of emerging social complexity in the Chinese and British Neolithic is a subject we are very keen to start exploring.

Along with this came the more contemporary concept of stuffification, the accumulation of material things eclipsing the more experiential world. We could, with a stretch of the imagination, suggest that the origins of stuffification came with the emergence of the sedentary lifestyle of the Neolithic and the ability to collect more stuff than you can carry with you. A direct correlation between social complexity of stuffification? Perhaps! We shall contemplate this further.

But first, our time line needed a little more work, so we literally brought one with us in the form of a tape measure - quite a long one.

At Clifton Antiquarian Club we have walked through history, we have cycled through history, this was a case of sprinting through history. Toby was given one end of the tape (our prehistory tape) and instructed to run off into the distance until the tape came to an end, which it did, exactly 100 metres along the hillside.

With a scale of 1 cm representing 1 year, Toby had run back to 10,000 BC, through prehistory and the beginnings of the holocene epoch. We then marked out with flags the beginning of Neolithic, the Bronze Age, Iron Age and finally the Roman period, bringing us to around year zero. This experiment was rather reminiscent of the scale model we made of the solar system at Avebury, and our journey to the centre of the Earth at the Moho Discontinuity at Coverack Bay in Cornwall.



Racing through time

Toby (it is tough being on your first Young Archaeologist outing) then sprinted back to the future, through the Mesolithic to the Neolithic in an impressive 16

seconds. It took him 6 seconds to cover the Neolithic, 3 seconds through the Bronze Age and just a footstep from the Iron Age to the Romans.

We then laid out our second (history) tape, just 20 metres and 15 centimetres, to today. With each Young Archaeologist standing at their birthday, the 21st century was a little congested!



Dylan reeling in the years



The Time Team





And some relaxation!

And with everybody safely back in the present, it was time to wind our way back down the hill and for our heroic Velocipede pioneers to head off another 40 miles to recce to next cycling outing. For everybody else, time to head home for tea. All in all, a great summers day out, thank you to all who came along and made it such fun.

Cover illustration courtesy of Hannah Swann