Billericay Archaeological and Historical Society newsletter

Spring 2025

Early Roman Imperial Scutum (Type of Shield)
- One of the most recognisable symbols of the Roman Empire

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I wish you a happy and healthy 2025 and hope, following on from our exciting anniversary celebrations of 2024, that you enjoy our planned programme of talks and events

I would like to thank David Bremner, and George Hemstock for their contributions to this newsletter and welcome a guest author, Denis Morine, for a fascinating article on the Romans and what we make of them.

Please make a note of the BA&HS AGM which will begin promptly at 7.30 on April 14th

Please be aware that Roger Perry, our Front of House officer, Chris Crane, our catering manager, and Lynne Beard, Minutes Secretary, are hoping to relinquish those duties and so we are looking for willing and able volunteers to succeed them.

Please can I also remind you that the annual subscription was due in January. Please contact Lynne if you still need to pay, lynne.beard@talk21.com

Jacky Hathaway BA&HS Newsletter Editor

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Future Programme

April 14th	Alan Murdey	Commonwealth War Graves Commission Archives
May 12th	Mark Lewis	London through Artists Eyes
June 9th	Jason Middleton	History of the Pearl, a famous gemstone
July 14th	Joanna Bogle	Caroline Chisolm – a19th Century Heroine
August	NO MEETING	
Sept 8th	Adrian Wright	How Railways began – 200 years ago
Oct 13th	Nick Dobson	Spanish Civil War – a portrait of turmoil
Nov 10th	Viv Newman	International (English speaking) Women at War
Dec 8th	Chris White	Picasso

Catering Report

Apart from my thanks and appreciation for all those who help on the Rota, I have good news to report, that after Alan's appeal at the January meeting, 2 new members have offered their services. Welcome and well done Jo and Geri.

Also I have decided to pass the Refreshment Rota on to another person as from the AGM in April. At the moment whoever it will be is a mystery waiting to be solved.

Please form an orderly queue…..

Refreshment Rota 2025

March.	Jonathan & Graham
April.	Chris & volunteer
May.	Jo & Geri
June.	Tesni & David
July.	Linda & Lesley
Aug.	No meeting
Sept.	Geoff & Heather
Oct.	Graham & volunteer
Nov.	Mike & Barbara
Dec.	Coryn & volunteer

Chris Crane

Meeting notes 2024

Sept 9th Britain's Railways in Edwardian Times Adrian Wright

Quoting articles written at the time, Adrian enabled us to picture the railways and how they were used in Edwardian Times. He described the differences between the various companies and how they developed. Using photographs, he explained the need for different types of steam locomotives and their relative merits. We also understood how society changed as a consequence of the railways; from different class carriages, to different reasons for travel; holidays, sports events, commuting.

Oct 14th 1066 Julian Whybra

We learnt a great deal from Julian's talk about the issues around succession that led up to the Battle of Hastings. The reigning monarch chose the next King who had to be of royal blood and approved by the nobility, church and the people. Documents show that Edward the Confessor selected Harold Godwinson to be King but William of Normandy claimed that Edward had previously chosen him. Use of detailed family trees showed how complicated the situation was.

Nov 11th A tour of Elizabethan London Nick Dobson

Nick took us on a very interesting virtual tour of Tudor London using photos and drawings of landmarks as we passed on our way. Explaining their significance and describing their purpose during Tudor times he brought the scene to life for us.

Dec 9th 15 minutes of fame Members

The beginnings of the Epping Ongar Railway	Adrian Wright
The Billericay Union Workhouse	Jonathan Unwin
My Father, My Hero	Doug Smith
The Battle of Bekesborne	David Blee
The Silicon Age	David Bremner
The Christmas Truce 1914	Roger O'Rourke

2025

Jan 13th Ramses II: How great was he? Janet Brewer

Ramses II was great for several reasons, according to what we learnt from Janet's talk. He lived for nearly 90 years when the average lifespan was nearer 50 years; he fathered more than 100 children that survived infancy; he built extensively throughout Egypt; he brokered the first known treaty after Battle of Kadesh; but mainly he was great because he says he was!

Feb 10th The beginnings of working class leisure culture Ted Woodgate

Prior to the industrial revolution the population consisted, in the main, the rural poor and landed gentry. After 1850 more people moved from the countryside to the cities to find work in the factories. Economic factors led to more affordable prices for the workers as well as improvements in working practices and increased leisure time. Ted described well how the working class used this time.

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We know about the transport system and we enjoy travelling, but where did the metal come from? How metals may have been found in the stone age

A Stone Age man at the feast has several coloured stones that he likes to display. One accidently lands into the hot fire. On the next day, looking in the fire area for his stone, he finds, in the approximate area where the stone was dropped a blob of very hard material. Unknowingly, he had witnessed the extraction of a metal ore from rock in the presence of extreme heat, now called **smelting.**

Stone Age people were used to investigating every resource that might be usefully employed to help their survival. They were very adept at making full use of all the different resources available to them, such as: fire, bone, wood, clay, stone, flint, skins, etc. This was necessary in order to survive in a hostile world.

By smashing these special-coloured stones, then subjecting them to a very hot source of heat, it was realised that different types of metals were being produced from the different types of rock. They therefore had to investigate these blobs to determine their different properties and to find the best way to make use of them. They could distinguish them by colour, hardness, malleability, lustre [shine]. They had to experiment to find the best way of extracting the different ores from their particular rock in sufficient quantity to be useful.

As a rough guide to the availability of these metals in the past, I have made a short table: Tolerance +/- 20%

Gold [Au] and Copper [Cu] c 2,400 BC Tin [Sn]: c 2,000 BC
Iron [Fe], Lead [Pb] and Silver [Ag]: c 800 BC

ALLOYS: a metal made by combining two or more metallic elements, especially to give greater strength or resistance to corrosion. These alloys may have been discovered by say a smith melting copper in a crucible previously used to melt tin and realised the better properties of the new mixture.

Bronze: Copper 90% and 10% tin c 2,000 BC Steel: c 800 BC – 1861AD
Brass: Copper [Cu] and Zinc [Zn]. c 43 AD Pewter: Tin [Sn] and lead [Pb]. c 43 AD

Metal	Symbol	Ore
Gold	Au	Or
Copper	Cu	Chalcopyrite
Tin	Sn	Cassiterite
Iron	Fe	Magnetite, Haematite, Pyrites
Lead	Pb	Galena- lead sulphide
Silver	Ag	Argentite – silver sulphide
Zinc	Zn	Sphalerite

These two imagined ways of discovering the existence of metals, are only two of many ways that metals may have been realised. I leave It to your imagination. The engineering challenge was to understand the limitations and advantages of all the materials that were available to use.

Techniques of extracting metal from its ore:

A BLOOMERY is a type of metallurgical furnace once used widely for smelting iron from its oxides. The bloomery was the earliest form of smelter capable of smelting iron. Bloomeries produce a porous mass of iron and slag called a bloom and has to be further forged into wrought iron. A bloomery consists of a pit or chimney with heat-resistant walls made of earth, clay, or stone. Near the bottom, one or more pipes (made of clay or metal) enter through the side walls. These pipes, called tuyeres, allow air to enter the furnace, either by natural draught or forced with bellows or a trompe. An opening at the bottom of the bloomery may be used to remove the bloom.

SMELTING is a process of extracting pure metals from their ores through heating and melting. It is an essential step in producing usable metals from raw ores extracted from mines. The end product of smelting is molten metal, which can then be refined into pure metal for use in making various products. It is a form of extractive metallurgy that is used

to obtain many metals such as iron, copper, silver, tin, lead and zinc. Coke, then charcoal replaced coal in order to get a higher temperature from the source of heat.

The BLAST FURNACE, which produce pig iron, have largely superseded bloomeries.
A blast furnace is a type of metallurgical furnace, in the form of a tower, used for smelting to produce industrial metals, generally pig iron, but also others such as lead or copper. Blast refers to the combustion air being supplied above atmospheric pressure to the mix.

The **BESSEMER PROCESS** was the first inexpensive industrial process for the mass production of **STEEL** from molten pig iron before the development of the open-hearth furnace. The key principle is removal of impurities from the iron by oxidation with air, oxygen, being blown through the molten iron.
Development of the different types of iron produced by the controlled application of carbon:

Pig iron => wrought iron => cast iron => steel.

I think it is fair to say that the average person in the Stone Age understood the properties of materials, such as wood, clay and iron, far in advance of the public today.
The understanding of the properties of metals and how best to use them developed as the engineering challenges of the steam engine increased. Initially low-pressure engines were made. [Savery, Newcomen]. Then, as knowledge of the ways of refining the metal improved, high pressure steam could be used to enable the static engine to become a mobile engine, [Trevithick} leading to the locomotive {Stevenson}, and the ability to travel that we enjoy today
Understanding of the magnetic properties of metals led to the development of the electric generator and electric motor [Faraday]. As the understanding of the properties of new metals continues, super-sonic flight and space travel have become possible.

STONE AGE: 3 PHASES: PALAEOLITHIC C 659,000 – 10,500 BC;
MESOLITHIC: C 10,500 – 5,500 BC
NEOLITHIC: C 4,000 – 2,500 BC

BRONZE AGE C 2,500 – 700 BC

IRON AGE C 700 BC – 43 A D

David A. Bremner

Does Britain remember the Roman Empire?

Early Roman Imperial Scutum (Type of Shield)
- One of the most recognisable symbols of the Roman Empire

In general, Britons are quite conscious of their Roman history. In school, we all learned about Julius Caesar's invasions, Boudica's rebellion, maybe even chuckled at some "Rotten Romans" on the nationally adored Horrible Histories show. We might have even designed our own red and yellow Roman legionary shields for Roman Day (at least, I fondly remember that I did!). Yet, the Romans often feel distant, almost like figures out of the legendary or fictional past. It's easy for us to dismiss them too literally as ancient, far removed from the 21st-century Britain we live in.

Whilst Britain undoubtedly acknowledges its connection to the Roman Empire, it's not entirely clear whether it remembers in the right way. Instead of romanticising or blindly criticising them—or ignoring them altogether—it's crucial that we look to the Romans by fairly assessing the traces they've left behind and the cultural impacts they've had. This is essential for understanding Britain's historical journey. With today's interconnected world, where the Internet allows us to readily access all sorts of information and learn about people contemporary and ancient alike, it seems now is the ideal moment to reevaluate British cultural history. And where better to begin than the Romans?

Museum model (made in 1968) of how Fishbourne Roman Palace may have appeared

Immanuel Giel, 21 August 2007, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Fishbourne_model.JPG [accessed 19 August 2024].

Viewing the Romans as merely ancient can make us overlook the fact that they were here two millennia ago and left their mark on the landscape. If we take a closer look—and do a little digging beneath the surface—the surviving physical legacy of our Roman predecessors becomes clear. From the awe-inspiring ruins of Fishbourne Palace in Chichester, the Roman baths of (well...) Bath, to the remnants of Hadrian's Wall in the north, and even the London Mithraeum, tucked rather unassumingly beneath Bloomberg Headquarters, there's ample evidence that Rome was truly a real and lasting part of the British timeline. Not simply stories, but living, breathing people under a far-reaching empire.

While the Romans undoubtedly left behind impressive buildings, like temples and palaces, and advanced infrastructure, such as roads and aqueducts, we should refrain from looking at their impact on Britain through rose-tinted glasses. Their conquest, starting in the 1st Century AD, and continued settlement, lasting until the 5th Century AD, involved harsh violence, cultural erasure, and the systematic oppression of the native Celts. After all, the Roman invasion was driven by imperial ambition and foreign dominance, not benevolence.

The London Mithraeum in the Bloomberg Space

In this way, the Roman influence on Britain cannot simply be categorised as “good” or “bad”. Although the remarkable contributions of Roman engineering, law, and infrastructure that have shaped Britain cannot be denied, it is equally important to acknowledge the darker aspects of their rule: the eradication of indigenous populations and the resulting cultural losses. Recognising this complexity means that we can have a more honest and comprehensive understanding of the Romans’ impact on Britain.

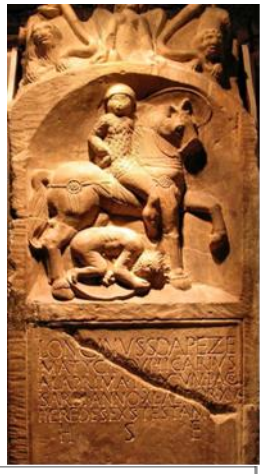
Of course, I would be wrong to deny that Roman Day and Horrible Histories, among others, are fantastic in introducing children to the Roman part of British history in a fun and engaging way. Nonetheless, they understandably tend to highlight the more entertaining and sensational elements of the Roman era, not being able to fully capture the deeper issues. While they succeed in sparking an interest into our early history, these forms of education can inadvertently present a simplified perspective that overlooks the broader conflict at play. As a result, through no fault of their own, these tools might unintentionally contribute to an uninformed or overly favourable opinion of the Romans.

A striking example of some material evidence that sums up the cultural debate is displayed in Colchester Museum, where you'll discover an array of tombs commemorating the lives of a number of veterans. These tombs give insight into the real individuals that inhabited the Roman capital of Britain, Camulodunum (otherwise called Colonia Victricensis). These veterans are both exemplars of the Roman presence, celebrated and loved in their own right, but are also key figures of Roman oppression.

Map of Roman campaigns 43-60AD

Among the best maintained of these is the tombstone of Longinus Sdapeze, a Thracian cavalryman (originating from modern Bulgaria) who was a member of the Claudian invasion force of AD43. The statue adorning his tombstone, showing him decked out in military gear atop a galloping horse, presents an admirable depiction of an ideal and romanticised soldier. Additionally, if you look carefully beneath the horse, you will find a cowering, naked Celt, either in desperate supplication or in despair of their life. Here, the Roman conquest is embodied—the tomb is almost certainly an attempt to underline the Roman effort in suppressing barbarians and civilising the wild and fierce British borderland. The Roman is both literally and figuratively portrayed as above the indigenous.

Sdapeze's tomb's inscription reads:



The Funerary Stela of Longinus Sdapeze - Colchester Museum

LONGINUS SDAPEZE

MATYCI (FILIUS) DUPLICARIUS

ALA PRIMA TRACUM PAGO

SARDI(CA) ANNO(RUM) XL AEROR(UM) XV

HEREDES EXS TESTAM(ENTO) [F(ACIENDUM)] Ç(URAVERUNT)

H(IC) S(ITUS) E(ST) (Translated: Longinus Sdapeze, son of Matycus, Duplicarius of the First Wing of Thracians, from the country district of Sardica, who lived for forty years, with fifteen years paid service. His heirs set this up as stipulated in his will. He lies here.)

Despite the propaganda associated with his presentation, Sdapeze was a real person, with a father called Matycus and heirs (most likely his children) who fulfilled the tombstone's construction, as was Sdapeze's wish. This snapshot, one of thousands, shows us that the Romans weren't a fantasy, nor faceless conquerors—they were real people, above and beyond their ruins, having ancestors and descendants of their own who lived, worked, and died here, and whose memory endures.

At the same time, we must not sidestep the existence of the cowering barbarian, unnamed but undeniably real, representative of wider systemic persecution, who coexisted with Rome's time with Britain. By coming to terms with the Roman impact—its achievements and atrocities, virtues and vices, triumphs and tragedies—we can gain a more holistic appreciation of Roman Britain and its place within the broader scope of British heritage, with the distinct hope of further correcting potential distortions and or false narratives regarding our shared past.

So, to wrap up, yes, Britain definitely does remember the Roman Empire, through both the sheer abundance of archaeological evidence left behind and our recognition of the Romans as a significant period of our national history. In some sense, though, we might say our recollection of empire is too fond, partly due to such things as Horrible Histories, making light of the morbid. But, I think, this is not as bad a thing as it initially might seem. Of course, it is of utmost importance to treat and present history with as much accuracy as possible, to showcase each side of the narrative equally and fairly. And whilst children's events and programmes, our primary entry into Roman Britain, may naturally lose out on the nuance of socio-cultural dynamics, it is a much greater thing, in my opinion, to look back optimistically, or even with a tinge of comedy. For, it is valuable to engage with the darker slice of history in a more playful and lighthearted manner (like Simon Farnaby's hilarious portrayal of a disturbed, murderous, and psychotic Caligula). Not only does this invite enjoyment in the history itself, but allows us, both young and adult, to better come to terms with it. As long as comedy doesn't compromise historical accuracy, from there, we can have the best foundation to work on both appreciating and comprehending our past.

The Revolt of Boudica - John Cassell's *Illustrated History of England* (1857)

The house at Manor House Farm. A house built of limestone, in Lincolnshire

The oldest part was a cottage, it was L shaped and had a room that we called ‘the living room’ with a beamed ceiling and a staircase leading to a bedroom above, and another room that we called ‘the back kitchen’ which also had a beamed ceiling, and a ladder, leading to a loft above.
As you entered the ‘back kitchen’ from the yard; to the left was a long and wide biscuit coloured sink with a large waste pipe (almost a tunnel) that just went straight down through the wall and exited onto the grate of an open drain. The sink had a hand operated pump at one end, which drew water from an outside underground cistern that was supplied by rainwater from the roof. Next to this was the corner of the room, which had built into it, a copper with fire under it, for the laundry. Then there was a black cast iron cooking range, and then in an alcove the next corner, there was a cast iron stove that we always called ‘the donkey’; presumably because it did the work of heating the hot water for the whole house. On the next wall there was a semi-rotary pump, mum’s Belling electric cooker and a door to the pantry. On the final wall there was a door to the ‘living room’, the loft ladder, and a door that opened onto a stone stairway down to the cellar, which was below the living room, and had a long stone bench which was well worn, through years of use butchering animal carcases.

The living room had a flagstone floor, a fireplace with cupboards either side, a sash window that rattled on windy days, a front door, and iron hooks on the main beams which were probably for hanging meat; dad’s 12 bore rested on two of these hooks.

Above this was the bedroom, with sloping ceilings, (from which you could hear the patter of feet of rats or mice at night), odd shaped niches and two small, sliding sash windows. This old cottage was topped with a pantiled roof.

At sometime in the 19th century an adjoining house was built, this had two ground floor rooms one we called ‘the dining room’ and the other we called ‘the far end room’. The dining room had one sash window facing west, two ceiling beams and a fireplace with cupboards either side (this in earlier days had been a large inglenook fireplace). The room was separated from the far end room by the front door entrance lobby which led straight to a staircase. The far end room had a west facing sash window and a south facing sash window and a fireplace. Both rooms had similar sized bedrooms, with fireplaces, above them, and above them were two attic rooms both with small windows in the two gable end walls, and hinged roof lights that could

be propped open, in the east facing roof. This part of the house had a slate roof. The attic room above the dining room had water storage tanks that had, before the arrival of mains water; been filled from the rainwater cistern using the semi rotary pump on the back kitchen wall. The east half of the slate roof was extended further than the west, to cover two more rooms: one a narrow bedroom, the other, a bathroom. Below them was a small storeroom accessible from the dining room, a long pantry accessible from the back kitchen, a storage shed and two ‘bucket and chuck it’ type privies, only accessible from the outside of the house.

It seemed that when the newer slate roofed part of the house was added, the stair in the living room, which turned to go to the bedroom above, was modified to also go straight up to one of the main bedrooms. Cable operated bells had been placed at the bottom of the stair which suggests that the old cottage part was occupied by a servant.

I was born in that house and lived there for twenty one years. In 1963 Buckminster Estate who owned the farm, decided to modernise the house, and after removing two staircases, one front door, and converting the back kitchen into an office and a fuel store; I thought that they spoiled it. But I loved it; and they were being practical. No doubt there will be more changes in the future, just as there had been in the past, all just part of the history of the house at Manor House Farm.

George Hemstock

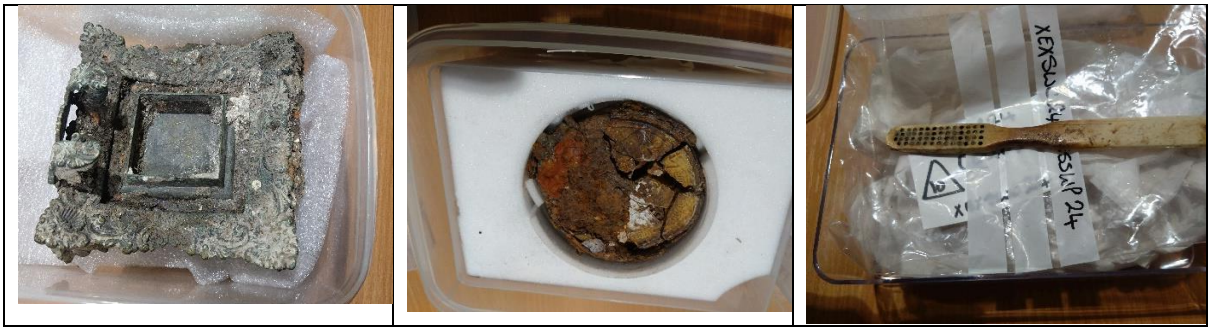
Findings at the Weald Hall dig

Recently we were able to attend the presentation of the findings of the Community Dig at Weald Hall held at the Essex Record Office. (See Newsletter Autumn 2024)

James Fairbairn, the archaeologist from Oxford Archaeology gave the presentation and began by explaining what is meant by a Community Dig. It is an opportunity for local, interested amateurs to participate in a professional dig and learn the different skills – excavating, recording, identification, evaluation – and enjoy being part of a team.

The original plan was to explore 3 areas where it was known the Hall stood but time constraints meant only 2 areas were looked at. Area A was known to be a utilitarian area – laundry, cellars etc and Area B was the servants’ quarters. As described in the previous newsletter foundations and flooring were found as expected.

At this presentation we were shown the 1500+ artefacts retrieved from the site. Fragments of kitchen crockery, china plates, glass bottles, animal bones were found in quantity. Intriguing finds were the ink well and wax seal, perhaps desk furniture, and a toothbrush



The purpose of the stone bath is still a mystery but James is hoping to find out more by researching old plans of the Hall

This project was enabled by funding from the Lower Thames Crossing Community Fund. For further information visit the Oxford Archaeology website

https://oxfordcotswoldarchaeology.org.uk/project/south-weald.

To view the above presentation please download https://we.tl/t-ujfDVzVQ6P

Apparently the dig was visited by ”Digging for Britain” BBC2 and James took items to their “tent”. It is hoped to be included in next year’s series.

Jacky Hathaway and Chris Crane

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For your information: Future talks at the Essex Record Office

- Mayhem in Maldon – Court documents from the Moot Hall

Tuesday 1st April 10.40am

- Discovering the Industrial Revolution in Essex: John Bookers legacy, past, present and future

Saturday 26th April 9.30am

- Henry Winstanley 1644-1703 , builder of the Eddystone Lighthouse and resident of Saffron Walden

Tuesday 6th May 10.40am

- ERO presents Raising Steam: an update on the Holden F5 project

Tuesday 1st July 10.40am