

Secretary's Report 1981 Mr Chairman, the Society has completed another full and busy year. A notable achievement has been the recruitment of new members with whose support Society ranks have swollen to the highest figure yet recorded on the Accounts Sheet - 220 members fully paid-up to December 1980, a source of great encouragement to us all.

Excluding tonight's gathering, but taking into account the Annual Dinner in February, members have assembled on eight occasions over the winter months to hear in all no less than twelve speakers expound on a wide variety of archaeological subjects. Perhaps an even more remarkable - and, I imagine, a little recognised - fact is that of these twelve contributors, seven were themselves card-carrying members of the East Riding Archaeological Society, proving the point with emphasis that the Society is a veritable treasure-house of academic culture from which an unprecedented array of archaeological talent has been unleashed before you this year! The Neolithic and Bronze Ages were admirably reviewed by Terry Manby; the Iron Age, home and abroad, brought to life by the good Doctors Whitwell and Stead; the Medieval landscape surveyed by Stephen Moorhouse; and the East Riding Romans reinterpreted by Professor Norman. This latter event demands particular notice and a special word of thanks in view of its unscheduled nature with Professor Norman gamely stepping into the spotlight to replace the indisposed speaker in March. Reviews of the Humberside Archaeological Unit's work at Wetwang and Beverley, and a particularly close-up inspection of Roman, Viking and Medieval York completed the programme.

The Annual Dinner merits a paragraph to itself in that ninety of us in total - the biggest turn-out of the year by far - had the pleasurable experience of

sharing the evening and reestablishing contact with John Bartlett who was as sprightly, convivial and entertaining as ever, as he paraded archaeology old and new before us while the wine flowed!

Another well-organised excursion by our Vice-chairman, Keith Simcock was marred somewhat by unseasonable weather in June when the frontier forts of Vindolanda, Chesters and Corbridge took on that typically British wet-look which must have been such a depressingly familiar characteristic of an unpopular Roman army posting. This day was archaeological empathy in its rawest state. Good humour and company carried the day - ... I think!!

The Society has maintained its laudable publication programme with the appearance of Volume 6 of the East Riding Archaeologist, "Excavations in Scale Lane/Lowgate 1974" combined with the Holme-upon-Spalding-Moor kiln report - an important exposition of the medieval pottery some 35 years after it first came out of the ground! Material is in hand for the next journal, a composite volume, and for the moment at least the future of Society publications is a bright one.

Bright may, or may not, be the word to describe ERAS News, which contrary to all expectations has maintained its regular quarterly appearance. I shrink from passing further comment, except to express the hope that it will continue to serve its purpose as an organ of communication to all members near and far, several of whom have maintained their invaluable support in the form of submissions of summaries, letters and reports. But more, please!

The brightest glow of all shining in the midst of the Society throng has its source in the heat generated through the interest and enthusiasm of that small band of fieldworkers who are leading the Society back into excavation and fieldwalking. The Field Study Group has met every month without fail over the past year and members have combined in weekend fieldwalking on four occasions now. Moreover, the same smiling faces have been seen every Sunday over a six-month period at the Society excavation site at Welton Road,

Brough, and efforts are being made to carry the work through to a written report for publication. These encouraging signs should be a source of excitement to all our members, of whatever persuasion, and every good wish is extended to these front-runners in their promotion and reestablishment of amateur interest, activity and responsibility in the East Riding and its archaeology.

In conclusion, as this present but soon to be replaced Hon Secretary slips into his seat on the back benches of the Society, the opportunity must not be let slip to extend thanks to all who contribute to the smooth running of our affairs. Newsletters would not arrive if Miss Lamb did not look after the envelopes; a welcoming cup at meetings would not be provided if Mrs Hanby and friends did not make special preparation in advance; and excursions would be hit and miss affairs if Mr Simcock did not take pains to ensure otherwise. Help is often unacknowledged publicly as it should, but it is never forgotten and ever to be encouraged.

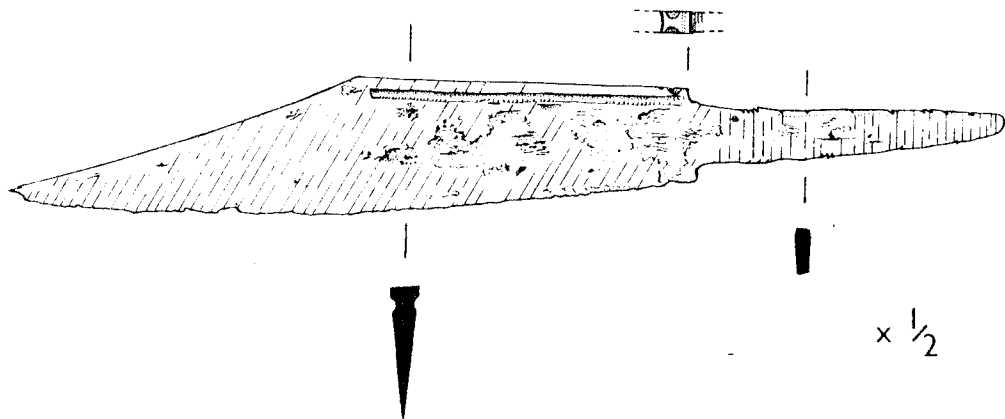
April 1981

More Page Three revelations in the ...

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● Suzie Small Finds Spot ●  
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After an exhilarating introduction in the last issue I eagerly put pen to paper to present yet another glittering goody. Our intrepid editor may well be correct in suggesting that this spot will provide the answers you never thought existed, as the following note aims to solve a little poser concerning an iron scramasax. Will the problem be ironed out? Or will Suzie Small Finds lose her mettle? (I suspect personal magnetism will pull you through, ed.)

The demented directorial ravings of an eager archaeologist at the Lurk Lane Site, Beverley, brought forth the clatter of downed tools and the patter of running feet. An iron scramasax knife in excellent condition was hastily passed through hot, sweaty fingers amidst appropriate "Ohs" and "Ahs" of excitement. Mr F.C.



A late Saxon iron scramasax from Butcher Row, Beverley

Maxtead of Barlby, near Selby, had very kindly brought the scramasax knife along to show Mr P. Armstrong. The knife, complete except for its handle, was found in March 1981 in the course of works for the Beverley High Level Main Drain. The scramasax came from the peat deposits at a depth of about three metres in Butcher Row, close to the junction with Toll Gavel and Walkergate, and was found by Mr Maxtead in whose possession it now is.

The knife is unruined, although a little pitted. The only damage is a slight break at the tip, but otherwise the slightly curved cutting edge remains sharp and intact, suggesting that the object was not discarded but probably lost. The straight back rises from the tang and at a point 8.6cm along its length breaks away at an angle to form the pointed tip. There are two grooves, one on each face of the blade, running parallel to the back of the knife. On one side the groove displays small serrations in three groups along the lower edge, probably due to the tooling method employed. The tang is offset from the blade and decreases in width towards the rounded tip. It also has serrations in the form of notched barbs on all four angles inclined toward the blade. These would have ensured a firm grip for the handle, which presumably, therefore, would have been of wood - or possibly bone. The top of the back of the knife has

a cut-out design at the shoulder close to the tang comprising two symmetrically opposed, hollowed semi-circles within two parallel lines. Otherwise the knife carries no decorative embellishment. Length 26.0cm; width of blade 3.5cm; maximum thickness of blade 0.7cm; width of tang 1.5cm.

The Butcher Row scramasax knife belongs to the later type characterised by a broad blade and back that tends to rise out of parallel with the cutting edge to the angle from which the point emerges. Decorated examples of this type in the British Museum are dated to the 9th and 10th centuries AD (Wilson, 1964, nos. 43 and 50). There is also a scramasax from York of a similar type with grooves on both faces (Waterman, 1959, fig. 7 no. 1). The knife has been conserved by Peter Sweeney of the Hull City Museums and drawn by Rob Gillan of the Humberside Archaeological Unit.

S.J.

Bibliography:

- Waterman, D.M., 1959, "Late Saxon, Viking, and Early Medieval Finds from York", Archaeologia, 97, 59-105.
- Wilson, D.M., 1964, Anglo-Saxon Ornamental Metalwork 700-1100 in the British Museum, London and Beccles.

Post script

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Whilst chance discoveries like the Butcher Row scramasax do not usually turn out to be quite so magnificently preserved after a thousand years in the ground, many archaeological finds do come to light under a variety of circumstances, particularly of course metal objects for obvious reasons today. In this instance the genuine delight experienced by Mr Maxtead in his splendid find was happily and ungrudgingly shared. As a result there is pleasure and satisfaction all round since the record of the discovery is as complete as it possibly can be, and in archaeological terms one could not wish for more. But how many things are wrenched from their find spots nowadays without the benefit of that important record - the 'what from where' information - without which often useful, and sometimes crucially important new evidence of our

past becomes just one more collectable antique, a valuable treasure to someone (nice to have, maybe even worth a bit!), but a hopelessly devalued relic to the rest of us. It is an obvious point of which Society members probably need little reminding, but it is clearly lost on others who for one reason or another do not, or choose not, to take it. Members can contribute a very great deal indeed to archaeology by the simple effort of making that point in places where it matters. Archaeological Societies, Units and Museums are each principally in the business of recording, gathering and preserving evidence of the past, and something called communication is the key to it all. Please help to keep the channels open.

P.A.

Show willing The East Riding Archaeological Society has taken a stand at the Hull Show in East Park for the two days, Friday and Saturday, July 31st and August 1st. It is, of course, an excellent opportunity to advertise the Society again, as at Beverley last year in the Lions' exhibition, and any assistance that members can offer would be greatly appreciated. In particular, two days of unrelieved canvas confinement calls for the greatest equanimity ("It's not so much the heat, or even the flies, Gerald, but those damned jungle drums ..."), so if you would be willing to help out on the stand even for an hour or two to man the publication sales desk or ring the changes with the recruitment patter, please get in touch with the rota manager, Peter Wilkinson, who is waiting for your call on Hull 443873. These events are usually great fun; I think you will enjoy yourselves. Peter and friends will be putting in a lot of effort and hard work to expose the Society to the public gaze, so do lend a hand if you can spare the time during any part of the two days.

Early Iron Age in Eastern Yorkshire The day conference and excursion jointly organised by ourselves and the Prehistory Research Section of the Yorkshire Archaeological Society for May 16th was a splendid success which bodes

well for further cooperation between the two Societies in the staging of similar events in the future. The morning session in the fine 'Chinese Room' at Lairgate Hall in Beverley set the Yorkshire Iron Age scene with first-rate contributions by each of the four guest speakers, Dr John Collis, John Dent, Dominic Powlesland and Dr Donald Spratt. The afternoon coach excursion, led by the day's Chairman, Terry Manby, took in the Scorbrough and Danes Graves square barrow cemeteries. The former is wide, impressive and airy - a surprise in the abundance of the survival - the latter encased in woodland, curiously resistant and steeped not only in history but in the pungent fetor of the nearby fellmongery! Bright and airy again and bathed in sunshine amidst the showers was Staple Howe, a detached piece of chalk Wold overlooking the Vale of Pickering and one of several such naturally defensible elevated platforms below the Wold brow where Early Iron Age folk lived within palisades, isolated communities tilling the chalklands above and grazing their stock in the pasture below. Tony Brewster's work here in the 1950s is still partially discernible in the marker posts planted to outline the round houses and granary of this most evocative and intimate of ancient sites. Alavish tea at the 'Snooty Fox' in West Heslerton rounded off a perfect day, or would have done had the coach had the good grace to start and return us to Beverley for 7pm as planned. As it was, there was a two hours or more delay punctuated by the bizarre effort of massed archaeological muscle against the passive might of a 57 seater vainly coaxing mechanical life where none existed! But then again not everyone was too concerned by the protracted stay at West Heslerton - happiest of all was the landlord!!

September Excursion The enclosure giving details of the outing to Laxton, Southwell Minster and Newstead Abbey speaks for itself. Depending on your choice of meal (and when did you last have a choice of ten on an excursion?!) the cost will be between £4.45 and £5.45, really excellent value. It's a late date for the principal excursion this year on account of the Beverley Iron Age meeting so

don't let it slip your mind. Settle the booking soon and look forward to the autumn!

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S Well, there's nothing we can do about that G  
G abysmal memory of yours, but if you can man- F  
F age to get out of the house unaided and fully S  
S clothed then the E.R.A.S. Field Study Group G  
G will give you the direction you seek. Yes, F  
F you probably haven't realised it until now, S  
S but the ERASFSG is really what you are look- G  
G ing for. The ERASFSG members are certainly F  
F looking for you! If you know now that you S  
S want to find out more, why not come along to G  
G the Wilberforce House Museum, High Street, F  
F Hull, on the first Wednesday of every month S  
S at 7.30pm. Soon you'll wonder how you ever G  
G managed without it. Certainly the Group is F  
F beginning to wonder how it is ever going to S  
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Meeting call A session of quality and variety is in prospect for the 1981/2 lecture programme, as a glance through your enclosed membership card for the coming year will amply confirm. Do help to make the meetings the resounding success each promises to be by coming along to the Ferens and contributing to the full attendances that our guest speakers so obviously deserve.

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Letters and contributions for inclusion in the newsletter should be addressed to :  
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