

NEWSLETTER

BALDOCK MUSEUM AND LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

Museum News

There is a new display in the Museum about the SERL, the Admiralty's scientific research establishment at Baldock. The display explains the history and purpose of SERL, describes the work of some of its leading scientists and looks at examples of the kind of research that was undertaken and its application. This has been written and presented for the Museum by Dr Pat Thornton, a former SERL scientist who also found some examples of precision engineering to show in the cases. Dr Thornton em-

phasises the good working atmosphere at the establishment and the quality and importance of its work. We are very grateful for all his work.

We are also grateful to Mr Chris Lunn (the printer in Whitehorse Street) for kindly donating a new swinging sign for the Museum. This helps make the place more visible when it is open and seems to be bringing more people in because attendance has been much better in recent months.

Coming Events

Thursday 22nd July "A Tale of Bicycles, Tricycles and Tractors: The Story of Dan Albone the Biggleswade Inventor" A talk by Judy Flack

Thursday 23rd Sept AGM, Quiz and Buffet Evening. This is usually a pleasant social evening and you will not be asked to do any jobs! So please come and join us. There will be a small charge of £2.00 for those staying for refreshments.

Thursday 25th Nov "The Great Northern Railway (1850 - 1923)" A short history of the company that built the line through Baldock in 1850. A talk by Ted Martin

All meetings at Baldock Community Centre at 8 pm.

Non-members always welcome at £1.00 admission

HELP !

The strength of the committee has dwindled somewhat of late and we need some more help. If any members could help out it would be much appreciated. We only meet once every two months and it is not necessary that you should know anything about local history only that you are willing to help!

We also need some more museum volunteers to help out as often as you can, once a month, once every two months as you like. We have had some problems covering lately because of illness etc.

Please contact the Chairman if you can help.

Museum Opening Times

Sunday 2 pm to 4 pm
Wednesday 11 am to 1.30 pm

Committee Officers

Chairman:	Brendan King
Secretary:	Stephen Childerstone
Treasurer:	John Merrett

New Book on Ancient Baldock

The big news on the local history front is that the first major archaeological report on ancient Baldock for almost 25 years has just been published: "Excavations at Baldock, Hertfordshire 1978 – 1994. Vol I An Iron Age and Romano-British cemetery at Wallington Road" by Gil Burleigh and Keith Fitzpatrick-Matthews. However this new volume, the first of several it is hoped, supersedes the earlier work of Stead and Rigby because it collates all the known information about the ancient town, much of which had been gathering dust in rows of unpublished, filed reports in North Herts Museums' stores for decades.

Bringing together all these pieces of information, deduced often from tiny scraps of archaeological evidence, and working it into a coherent history of ancient Baldock has been an immense undertaking and is greatly to the credit of the authors. Many of you will have heard the essence of their often surprising, not to say startling, conclusions in Keith's talks to this Society or read their booklet "Ancient Baldock: the story of an Iron Age and Roman town" (2007). This new book brings these conclusions to the attention of the wider world, or at least to the wider world of academic archaeology because that is the audience it is aimed at. However there is much in it that will interest anyone with more than a passing curiosity about the ancient town. As it is the first of a series it contains a lengthy introduction which explains the history of the excavations since 1925 and gives a general history of ancient Baldock along with some interesting maps which relate it to modern Baldock.

Of course this is primarily a report about one cemetery and, at first sight, not one of the more obviously interesting cemeteries, if one is looking for exotic or valuable grave goods. Each grave is

catalogued and the contents down to the smallest nail or fragment of bone are minutely examined and the general reader would probably skip a few pages although it is well worth trying to understand the value and information that can be drawn from these things.

The final section, the "Discussion", is most interesting for the conclusions it draws from the evidence in this cemetery: that it was a cemetery for poor labouring/peasant people perhaps from one clan or extended family, using it for a period of about 350 years from c 50 BC. Curiously over all that time the graves were respected and not cut into for new burials suggesting some marker or small pile of stones was used. This may provide an explanation for the extensive series of cemeteries of ancient Baldock because, like a modern cemetery, a large area is needed if each grave is respected. Compare this to St Mary's churchyard where, a modest calculation would suggest, some 14,000 bodies must be buried and which by the 1860s had reached a Dickensian state of over filling with "bones strewn about after every funeral". Another interesting feature is that most of the inhumations are laid facing south east, possibly to face the noonday sun at the midsummer solstice. Again it can be compared to the Christian practice of facing east towards Jerusalem.

The whole thing raises all sorts of interesting speculations and comparisons. It is well worth taking the trouble to read it and for all its detail it is more readable than most such reports. We have acquired a few copies to sell in the Museum at £20 (there are 272 pages) and we hope some of you will wish to buy one. If they run out please give us your name and address and we will get you a copy.

Kayser Bondor Film

We have been contacted by a group of enthusiasts who make short films to a high standard on various subjects. One of the group, Eileen Kenning, had by chance attended Neville Chuck's talk on the Bondor last year and was so impressed by the story and the "Spirit of Kayser Bondor" (as Moira Kent called it in her book) that she approached us with a view to making a ten minute film. A £250 grant was given by the Baldock Area Committee to the project and the Society has put some money towards it. We hope in time to put it on our website (www.baldockhistory.org.uk) and show it at an AGM. The film will consist of interviews with ex-Bondorites, stills and some archive footage that Mrs Kenning has discovered.
