

MARCHAM SOCIETY TALK

The emphasis of Gary Lock's talk was an overview through the ages of the Noah's Ark site. The scheduled site in the grounds of the Noah's Ark has been excavated three times: in the nineteenth century, in the 1930s, and in the 1960s. It appears to have been an extensive Iron Age ritual site dating from the 7th century BC which was later taken over by the Romans, but evidence does not prove direct continuity, despite a Romano British shrine being built directly on top of the earlier remains. There are also numerous rectangular crop marks in the scheduled site that do not conform to the general pattern of domestic Iron Age occupation, namely a farmstead with a more or less circular enclosure ditch. Here there is no apparent enclosure but a round house and some strange pits. These are traditionally thought to be for storage, but some had been cut through other pits and in the prevailing geological conditions it would be difficult to keep them airtight. Perhaps they were dug to contain ritual items as they have been found to contain bones and pottery vessels known as Frilford pots. There is also a straight mid-Bronze Age ditch dating from 1500BC which contained a cremation urn.

Close to the temenos wall, which enclosed the temple sanctuary area, is a huge Romano-British rubbish dump and nearby attached to the walls are remains of buildings thought to have been shops or workshops possibly selling trinkets and votive offerings or providing accommodation. Between these and the circular structure was a rectangular building which had a hearth and is thought to be contemporary with the shops.

The puzzling circular structure, originally thought to be an amphitheatre is 40m in diameter with a 1.5m embankment and sits at the end of a palaeo-channel, dating from the end of the ice age, which is clearly seen in aerial photographs. Amphitheatres were usually elliptical and theatres round, with a stage, but the presence of water at this site makes it more of an enigma. Its use might have been religious as it seems closely related to the temple. Excavations this coming year will investigate the existence of an exit through the temenos wall leading to the 'theatre'. An excavation in the middle of the circular structure has revealed a wooden post, dated to 85AD, and a series of drains set into the floor area dating from the 2nd to late 4th century AD. This will be the main area of excavation this year in the hope that it will clarify whether the water was integral to the site or the drains were merely the means of removing it. The rectangular room, nicknamed 'The Royal Box', on the south side remains an enigma. It appears to be a later addition as it cuts through the bank material. The burials discovered in the bank at the eastern end may well be associated with a ritual closure of the site. (see article in forthcoming Coral Rag – the Marcham Society Journal).

Gary concluded his talk with a brief word about the Roman-British cemetery across the A338. This was excavated earlier and consisted of two phases, Roman-British and Anglo-Saxon, which

is very unusual. The temple and the cemetery were in use together throughout the Roman period but the cemetery continued after the temple was abandoned at the end of the 4th century when Christianity became widespread. No real evidence of Christian worship on this site has been found although the rectangular building between the temple and the 'theatre' is aligned East/West.

It is planned that a geophysical survey of the cemetery will be undertaken in the spring and a postgraduate student will begin research in October in order to understand the relationship between the site and the wider Roman occupation landscape. *SD & JC*
See cover for pictures

MARCHAM SOCIETY'S VE DAY EXHIBITION

In the edition of the Marcham with Garford Parish Magazine printed in November 1939, there appeared a letter from a 'London Schoolmaster' expressing his thanks to all the foster parents in the parish who had housed the children evacuated from London. During that time an entry in the Marcham school log-book also recorded that 41 children and 4 teachers, now resident in the area, had left their school in Bow to seek refuge in the country.

A photograph in the local newspaper, the North Berks Herald, shows that evacuees were arriving at Culham station as early as September. Members of the Marcham Society are interested in any accounts of people coming as evacuees to the village and who may have settled here. The Society would like to include the information in the forthcoming VE Day exhibition.

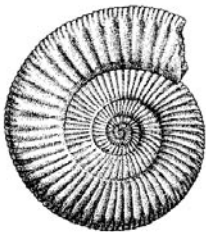
If you can help with this project please contact the Society's Archivist; Elizabeth Whitehouse, 01865 391389



MARCHAM SOCIETY WALK: THUR 3RD MAR

Come and enjoy a walk in early spring through the fields and woods around Boars Hill. We will meet at The Fox Inn (Map Ref: SP490015) at 12.30pm for lunch or 1.30 for the four mile walk, taking in the villages of Sunningwell and Old Wootton. As always, new walkers are very welcome. Members free, non-members £1. Ring Eric Dunford on 391439 for lifts and further details.

AAF8 Abingdon Arts Festival 12/3/05 - 9/4/05
www.abingdonartsfestival.org.uk
 Programme available from Abingdon Library

 <p><i>The Marcham Society</i></p>	<p>Marcham Society Annual Lecture Climate Change Hear the facts from atmospheric scientist, Professor Lesley Grey</p>
<p><i>All Saints' Church</i> Tuesday March 8th 2005, 7.45pm</p>	<p>Non-members £1 Further details: Janey Cumber (391327) or Judith Fontaine (391275)</p> <p style="text-align: right;">www.marchamsociety.org.uk</p>

Don't forget to look at OUR website: www.madnews.co.uk