



**SOUTHWELL COMMUNITY
ARCHAEOLOGY GROUP
ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2022**

Welcome to our end of year 'roundup'. It has been a busy year for SCAG on a number of different fronts and it is good to celebrate, and remind ourselves, of all the valuable work this group has undertaken.



FOREWORD -John Lock

It is a privilege and a pleasure to introduce this extensive review of the activities of Southwell Archaeology Group in 2022.

The group maintains a balance of undertaking good quality archaeological activities, with professional direction and support, in a friendly and positive setting for members and visitors alike. Cake, the traditional sustenance of archaeologists is often to be found in the most unlikely of places.

None of this is possible without the unstinting and continuing support of a wide range of people including in particular our Patron, The Dean of Southwell, The Very Reverend Nicola Sullivan, Honorary President, Geoffrey Bond, the trustees, who provide valuable direction, and the project leaders and committee members who make things happen and 'deliver.'

In addition, we are grateful for the support and encouragement of the professional archaeological community, together with that of Southwell Town Council and Southwell Library / Inspire who provide the accommodation for our activities.

Lastly my thanks go to the members for without their continuing enthusiasm and support, together with that of their families, friends and the wider community, the group would not exist.

John Lock,
Chair SCAG,
January 2023.

PATRON: The Dean of Southwell Minster, The Very Revd Nicola Sullivan

PRESIDENT: Geoffrey Bond O.B.E., D.L., LL.D, F.S.A.

VICE-PRESIDENTS: Professors Will Bowden and Chris Brooke

TRUSTEES: John Lock (Chair), Dr Stephen Rogers (Secretary), Professor Will Bowden, Professor Chris Brooke, Aoife Cleland, Professor Julia Davies, Peter Kent

Management Committee: John Lock (Chair), Stephen Rogers (Secretary), David Johnson (Treasurer), Maureen Handley (Speaker arrangements), Steph Platts, Peter Kent, John Laycock, Malcolm Hoare, Andy Weaver

2022 membership numbers: 51



SUMMER SCHOOL FOR YOUNG PEOPLE - Hannah Chilton

This is an edited extract from a report written by Hannah, who attended the summer school as a peer tutor, and which appeared in The Thoroton Society Winter 2022 Newsletter. It was in that newsletter that we learnt of the very sad news of John Wilson's death. John was treasurer of The Thoroton Society and a great supporter of SCAG, our condolences to family and friends.

"I am Hannah Chilton, granddaughter of John Wilson. I am 17, in the middle of studying for my A-Levels, and the youngest member of The Thoroton Society. In the first week of August 2022, I was given the opportunity to help out at an archaeological dig in Southwell with the Southwell Community Archaeology Group (SCAG), where five days were spent teaching children about archaeology, as well as how artefacts are extracted from the ground and then processed for research and storage.. My grandpa, John Wilson, had contacts with the group and arranged for me to attend, as well as acting as my taxi driver for the week!

I was able to assist the SCAG team, as I could help keep an eye on the children to make sure they were learning to look after the finds. During the week the children (who were aged eight to thirteen) were split into three groups, each of which was given a trench so that they could dig separately. This allowed them to learn how to keep their group's finds organised and then finally sort them, as well as how to understand the different layers of the ground.

The children thoroughly enjoyed the dig and were also treated to an hour of crafts, which changed each day, such as Viking bracelet making, Roman pottery with air dried clay, and mosaic making. This was enjoyed by all the children (including me) and we learnt information about the things we made.



During the week, the children discovered countless bits of pottery, glass, slag, ceramic building material (CBM), and some animal bones. Some of the best finds included a Georgian bottle base, a perfume bottle stopper, a broken bottle that could be put back together again, and a broken animal pelvis bone.

I am so thankful to my late Grandpa who arranged this experience for me, as well as everyone at SCAG who made me so welcome. Sincere thanks to Steve Rogers and Aoife Cleland who organised the week. This will definitely not be my last dig; I am so excited for the next one".



FINDS PROCESSING -Stephen Rogers

We were able to resume our regular Thursday afternoon sessions, and there has certainly been a lot to do following the COVID pandemic lockdown. We still had to identify and record finds from work on the Dean's Garden in 2018, both Vicars Court sites, and numbers 9 and 11 Church Street digs. A conservative estimate is that some 6,000 finds have been washed, weighed, described and inputted into a database; there were over 3,000 sherds of pottery from the two Norwell Overhall sites alone.

The data is now in the process of being summarised and put into reports. Preliminary findings reinforce that we are dealing with a significant early Medieval occupation in the centre of town.



An early highlight of the year was a visit to Stow organised by Jane Young and Jo Gray. Both have been great supporters of SCAG over the years and Jane had arranged for us to see a large collection of early to late medieval vessels and look at their fabrics in more detail. A lunch at the local pub and a visit to Stow Minster (one of the coldest buildings in the region) rounded off a good day.

Later in the year the finds recording focused on the large amount of bone material we had found, our thanks to Suzanne Gee for her expert teaching on bone id and recording.

We are grateful to all the specialists for their help: Jane, Jo, Suzanne and Zoe Tomlinson.

SPEAKER PROGRAMME - Maureen Handley.

SCAG resumed its usual programme of public meetings; these are now held in Southwell Library.

During 2022 we had various speakers sometimes with topics related to the work we were doing in Southwell. Julia Davis came to tell us about the history of the Brackenhurst estate.

James Wright spoke about Timber Framed buildings. The building section have been researching and recording the Timber framed buildings in Southwell.

Other speakers were related to archaeology but not necessary just Southwell.

Gary Taylor reported on the findings from an excavation of Roman Bourne and Steve Wright came to show the results of an excavation in Burton Joyce in the 1950's.

Jo Gray provided an illustrated talk on how she conserves funeral urns and what information she can get from them.

We also had a visit to the Norton Disney site in July prior to their excavation in the summer; members said it was very interesting and they enjoyed it.

Oh! and we also had a Christmas social. (At which the clinching question in the quiz was not an archaeology one but the name of the Simpsons' dog!)



At the Norton Disney site



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT-Stephen Rogers, Lyn Harris

Apart from the summer school, SCAG have been involved in other community ventures. A small group of us have supported Diana Ives and her education team at the Minster, helping to deliver days for school groups focused on the Romans, a national curriculum history topic. These days give a large number of primary school children from around the area an opportunity to visit the Minster, learn more about Roman Southwell and what life might have been like here in that period. In addition, Lyn ran a Roman pottery handling session for the 1st Southwell Rainbows, and Stephen did two sessions with the Southwell Cubs handling pottery, learning more about archaeology, and making their own pots.



In September SCAG set up a stall on Southwell market to display some of our finds as part of the national Heritage Open Week scheme; there was a lot of interest from members of the public. Our thanks to Southwell Town Council for their continued support.

ROMAN PAINTED WALL PLASTER CONSERVATION PROJECT - Stephen Rogers



We are very grateful to The Thoroton Society and to Geoffrey Bond for a research grant to support this project. The project was led by archaeologist Zoe Tomlinson, conservator Jo Gray with support from conservators Anne Atkinson and Emily Philips; our profound thanks for all their work on an inspiring project and a unique venture for SCAG that gave us an intimate look at ancient material and modern conservation techniques.

A quantity of Roman painted wall plaster from the bath house complex of the villa site in Southwell was recovered by Charles Daniels in his 1959 dig, prior to the construction of the school on the Church Street site. Forty-eight wooden fruit boxes were packed with this plaster lined with newspapers dating from 1961-1964 and later stored in the northwest tower of Southwell Minster. It was all in need of conservation, recording and re-boxing.

The initial research and conservation work, possibly undertaken in 1972 by Norman Davey, included some reconstruction which is now displayed in the Minster itself. The main area of wall painting on display represents a Cupid in a marine setting. Further reconstructed fragments stored in the roof space show parts of this marine environment including two standing nude figures. Although marine subjects are a common motif in bath houses (with British parallels in villas at, for example, Sparsholt, Winterton and Witcombe), the presence of the Cupid in a marine context is unusual.

“At some date after the foundation of the villa, a cold bath had been added to its eastern wing. This was almost completely demolished later on, and replaced by a new bath 25 by 25 feet in size. It was from this later bath that the fragments of elaborately-decorated plaster were recovered. Some time in the early third century this second bath was demolished and a considerable amount of its wall-plaster was sealed beneath a new floor, laid over the remains of the bath. When we consider that the painted plaster decorated a structure which was itself a rebuilding of an addition to the original east wing of the building, and that the earliest pottery from this area of the excavation was of the second half of the second century, it is unlikely that the paintings date much before, if at all, the last quarter of the century. They appear to have been demolished in the early third century”. (In Davey and Ling, 1981, pp. 64-65).

The excavation of the bath house proved complex, there was some argument as to whether the Cupid scene came from a wall or the ceiling. Daniels reports that:

“The site from which the decorated plaster was recovered was small and congested. Medieval robbing had removed about one third of the Roman bath, and workmen had removed a considerable amount of the plaster before they were stopped. The bulk of the decorated plaster lay directly on the floor of the bath, but many fragments also occurred in the demolition-rubble covering the area”.

When excavated the plaster was overlain by a grid and each square numbered, and the numbers supposedly placed in the boxes. Unfortunately, on unpacking of the boxes we found many of the numbers missing and joining up pieces may have to await a future software solution.

Each crate contained many fragments and after carefully unpacking a box the number of fragments and its original state was recorded. Each piece went for careful dusting followed by a very light sponge with distilled water. After which, the original colours were revealed, although many seemed to have a badly degraded varnish covering from the original conservation work that spoils the Roman colour effect. The pieces were photographed and a detailed database is still in the process of being compiled.

A new set of sturdy cardboard boxes were constructed and lined with acid free paper. Hopefully now the material is stabilised and will be preserved for future research and viewing.

The aim is to compile a robust database and a standardised type series for the material that can be used as a public research resource. There will be a full report complete with photographs and analysis of the findings.

SCAG LANDSCAPE PROJECT - Stephanie Platts

The Landscape Project began in August 2020, when English Heritage asked us to look at the area around Southwell and surrounding villages, identifying, recording and reporting anomalies in the landscape which may be of archaeological or historical interest for assessment and interpretation by professionals.

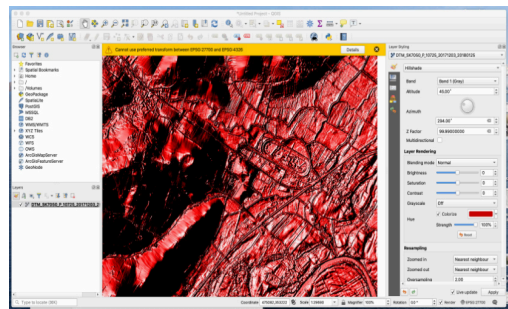
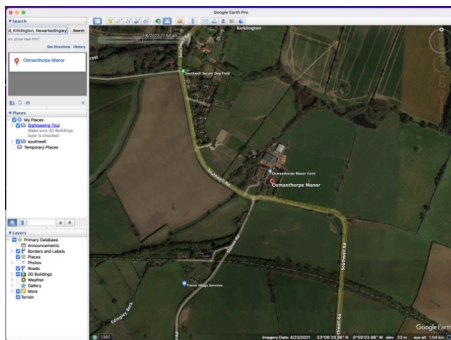
The project was ideal for the time of the Covid pandemic as it could all be completed using home computers, and no direct personal interaction.

We had meetings over Zoom, and training from the Archaeology department of Nottingham University and HER in the use of computer apps and websites that would use Lidar to reveal unexpected disturbances in the landscape. We also used Google Earth Pro and old aerial photographs to see changes in the landscape. We were hoping to find perhaps a Roman Fort (of which there are many in the Trent Valley), an iron age hill fort, a lost village, or some ancient round houses. Whether we did or not we will have to leave to the professionals to discover when they look over our spreadsheets.

We all enjoyed the project, and our interaction over Zoom was quite therapeutic for many of us when we were in lockdown.

We found some anomalies and documented them, and sent the results off for the professionals to look at towards the end of May 2022, at the end of the project.

Thanks to all who helped in the project, both professionals and SCAG participants.



PHOTOGRAMMETRY REPORT - Stephanie Platts

Photogrammetry is gathering data by analysing images, using advanced processing software. The photos used can be taken from the ground or from the air.

The photogrammetry group began in the summer of 2022 when Jim Sallis from Nottingham University gave us our first tutorial at Rufford Abbey.

We are now able to take pictures, and stitch them together to enable us to get a 3D view. We are also able to measure the objects with great accuracy.

Had it been in use at the time, this technique would have been very useful in Paris when the church of Notre Dame was badly damaged by fire. The builders repairing the church wanted to restore it as accurately as possible, but had no measurements to refer to, so they had to rely on tourist's photos. Most ancient buildings are not accurately documented as records were not kept hundreds of years ago.

At the
Rufford
Abbey site



We are all very proud to have now taken the Civil Aviation exam in drone use and passed! Our next step is to learn how to use a drone to take pictures. We will then be able to make a 3D record of some of our historic buildings, and also of our archaeological trenches.

Watch out for the increasing use of photogrammetry in television programmes - I noticed it in Digging for Britain recently.

Mediaeval Masonry Report- Clyde House, Southwell - Andy weaver



Objectives

1. Locate and use appropriate recording methods to accurately document the material.
2. Analyse and interpret the material to determine its likely spatial and temporal origin.
3. Ensure that a record of the artefacts is secured onto the SCAG website.
4. Develop the skillsets of the group and use the opportunities to consolidate these skills

Having undertaken various training opportunities under the auspices of Peter Ryder, members of SCAG were tasked with recording the numerous examples of mediaeval, post mediaeval and modern pieces of stonework located within the gardens of the Dean's Residence in Southwell. Over 250 separate pieces including present location were recorded. Subsequently the SCAG team were invited to record various items of ecclesiastical stonework discovered in the gardens Norwell Overhall Prebendary House and number 4 Vicars' Court, whilst excavations were being carried out on these premises.

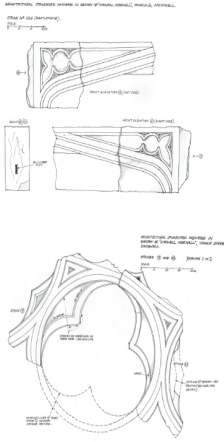
This year as part of the ongoing SCAG project to record, photograph and draw examples of mediaeval masonry located in the gardens of private residences in and around Southwell, members of the group spent 6 days investigating the various stone pieces in the garden of John and Lucy Murkett, Clyde House, Westgate, Southwell.

There were numerous examples of random rough cut rubble, a number of ashlar-faced pieces, without any decoration and 18 pieces of mediaeval mason-worked stones of various age and accomplishment. There exists also in the garden a standing arch reconstructed from 6 pieces of mediaeval window tracery which has its own HER listing. Whilst it would be logical to assume that these examples likely originated from Southwell Minster or the Bishop's Palace, we cannot be certain of this except where the style of decoration is directly attributable. We have suggested likely provenance and date where possible but these suggestions cannot be absolute as all the examples have been relocated out of their original context.

There appears to have been a tradition in Victorian and later times of the acquisition of superfluous pieces of ecclesiastical stonework to enhance the garden environment. The result is fortuitous in one sense in that the artefacts have survived and their present state recorded, but apart from the obvious links to elements of the Minster that have been demolished and replaced with later styles (ie the Norman Quire) or where specific stonework has been replaced it is very difficult to do anything beyond hypothesising the origin of many of the pieces.

Conclusions:

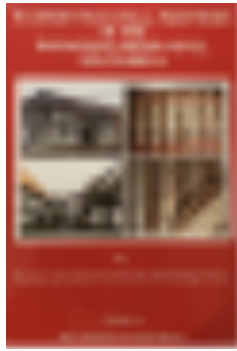
The various pieces of mediaeval stone that are located in this garden are not homogenous in the sense that we do not know their precise provenance. Whilst some pieces are most probably from the Minster and their provenance can be guessed at using stylistic detailing, this is not an exact science.



Elizabethan Wall Paintings in the Saracen's Head Hotel, Southwell - Dave Johnson

Our interest in the wall paintings in the Saracen's Head Hotel grew out of our work on pre 1750 timber framed buildings with Chris King of Nottingham University and Matt Hurford of Trent and Peak. We were surprised to find these rare and unpublicized gems in the Saracen's Head even though all of us had lived in Southwell for many years.

We were encouraged by Chris Brooke to research, record and publicize the existence of these historic paintings. We applied for and were awarded the Geoffrey Bond Award by the Thoroton Society in 2017 to do just that and we have drawn the project to a conclusion with the publication of our group's third book.



The book costs £6 and is available from our meetings and the Cathedral shop.

There is a copy in the library

The book deals briefly with the history of the Saracen's Head Hotel, formerly known as the King's Head and goes on to describe both the discovery, renovation and description of the paintings in the King Charles Suite and the Bramley Room.

We were delighted to have the full support of Chris Brooke and his colleagues from Bradford University as well as Andrea Kirkham, an expert conservator of early English wall paintings and her scientific findings are included briefly in the book.

Our thanks also to The Thoroton Society for their research award.



The King Charles Suite :
Stylised flowers within the strapwork, and left, a flower from the upper border



The Bramley Room



An angelic face from an earlier phase



Rope work or guilloche dividing the main panel

Then there is the mystery of a page torn from Mathurin Cordier's book *Colloquiorum scholasticorum libri quatuor* written and published in the late 16th century and found in an empty peg hole in the middle of the north wall of The Bramley Room.

Just when we thought it was all over, another surprise: at the book launch in the Bramley Room of the Saracen's Head on the 19th November, under newly installed modern lighting in the room, we saw remnants of the early phase that we had not seen before.

We need to go back.

Breaking news: we have been given the approval of the Council for British Archaeology, to establish a young archaeologist club (YAC) for young people in Southwell aged between 8 - 16 years. Our launch will be on 11th March. For more details contact Stephen, on contact@southwellarchaeology.org

