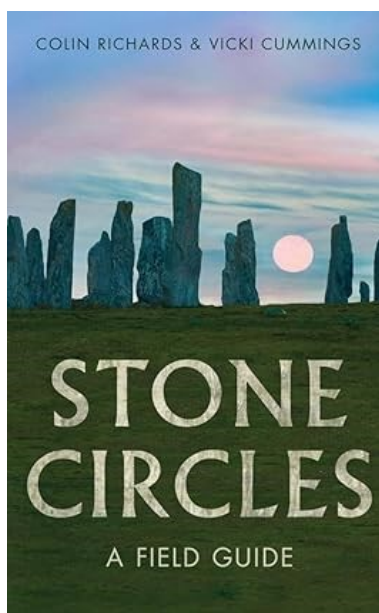


# BASINGSTOKE ARCHAEOLOGICAL & HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Newsletter Number 251

**MAY 2025**



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Hello, and welcome to the May newsletter.



2025 marks the 75th anniversary of the demobilisation of the Women's Land Army. For those who were unable to attend John Lander's talk "*Don't delay, enrol today* - The Women's Land Army in Hampshire", there's a resume on page 7.

Edith Alice Weston (1883-1956) was a 'militant suffragette' and Basingstoke's First Woman Mayor. On page 16, Roger Ottewill tells the story of this remarkable woman.

Also in this edition, David Hopkins, the Hampshire County Archaeologist, describes the very first car journey: a 4hp P Panhard-Levassour which passed through Basingstoke on 11<sup>th</sup> July

1895. And we have plenty of edible history and archaeology - thanks as ever to Pauline Hedges!

There are two talks remaining in our lecture programme before our summer break: Alan Turton on "The Civil War in Hampshire" and David Whiter on "East Anglia and the Arrival of the Anglo Saxons" (details on page 28). And finally, if you would like to get involved in our Romano-British Stanchester dig, it's not too late and we'd love to hear from you.

Looking forward to seeing you at some, or all, of the above events!

*Penny Ingham*

## Stanchester Excavation 2025

This year we will be returning to the Stanchester Roman site for a three-week block of excavations from Saturday July 26<sup>th</sup> to Saturday August 16<sup>th</sup>. This year we are aiming to complete our investigation of the domestic building that we have been working on since 2021 and to explore what lies around the possible stoke hole discovered last year.



If you would like to get involved, then you would be welcome to join in. We will provide training and opportunities to take part in the wide range of activities that keep the site running including digging, recording, surveying, photography and finds processing.

Nearer the time, we will have a Teams meeting to give an overview of the project so far and to explain our plans for this year in more detail. If you would like the link for the meeting or would like to make sure that you are on the list for Stanchester 2025 then please contact me.



**Mark Peryer:** (email: [markperyer@gmail.com](mailto:markperyer@gmail.com) Tel: 07770 832397)

## OBITUARIES

### **Josie Wall - March 1935 - January 2025**

Josie, with her late husband Mike, was a founder member of the Society. She was a volunteer helper for Barbara Applin at the Buckskin dig in the 1960s. Josie and Mike were both regular attendees of our lecture meetings at various venues over the years until prevented by age and infirmity. The on-line meetings during lockdown enabled her to still join Society activities.

She was a great lover of wildlife and all animals, always keeping at least one dog until recently. Josie was a keen art lover and she and Mike were supporters of all the local theatres and music performance venues. One of her skills which many members may be unaware of was modelling in clay – figures, animals, flat pieces for wall mounting - which were distinctive in style. She became more interested in industrial archaeology than excavating, and also in local history, learning how to read old documents, which was put to good use deciphering wills for the Victoria County History work on Basingstoke and surrounding villages.

She died peacefully a month short of her 90th birthday and will be missed by all her friends.

And Diana Medley sent us this in memory of **Babs (Rose) Roberts**, who sadly passed away in March:

“Babs was a lovely lady; she was strong, kind and generous. She loved to travel – the Pyramids of Giza, Pompeii, Machu Piccu and Australia to name but a few. She loved to ski, and she loved history and archaeology. I met Babs when I joined BAHS and we went on many courses together at Reading and Bristol Uni. For 30 years Babs was my very dear friend and we spent a lot of time together on digs, going to the theatre, going on holiday to Cornwall – we even did indoor sky diving together, which she loved. Many of our outings had to be cancelled over the past few years due to ill health and sadly Babs never got to do the Zip Wire which she really wanted to do. Babs has been a constant in my life. I have tried to keep this short but there is so much I could say. For 30 years Babs has been a constant in my life. She was great fun to be with and I shall miss her so very much.”

## PAULINE HEDGES' LATEST CREATION FEATURED IN CURRENT ARCHAEOLOGY (again!)

We are delighted to announce that Pauline Hedges' edible archaeology cake was featured in the May edition of Current Archaeology. This is the second time one of her creations has graced its pages! The latest cake was crafted to celebrate Richard Osgood's visit to BAHS in March, when he talked about excavations at Boles Barrow on Salisbury plain.

### EDIBLE ARCHAEOLOGY

Basingstoke Archaeological and Historical Society meet once a month to enjoy a varied lecture programme. In March, Richard Osgood MBE, Senior Archaeologist for the Defence Infrastructure Organisation within the MOD, came to talk to us about 'Bluestone, Bones, and Bombs: excavations at Boles Barrow on Salisbury Plain'. The monument had been deemed 'at risk' by Historic England, and this latest excavation was part of a programme to preserve the site. It was also the earliest monument type yet investigated by Operation Nightingale.

To celebrate Richard's visit to BAHS, Pauline Hedges created a wonderful Boles Barrow cake. The base is chocolate cake, covered with green fondant icing, and the barrow is a chocolate Swiss roll. The depressions on top of the 'barrow' represent earlier excavations by antiquaries. The 'bombs' are made from black fondant icing and the legendary bluestone, supposedly found there and donated to Salisbury Museum by the war poet Siegfried Sassoon, is depicted as a fondant cloud shape. The cannon balls/hand grenades are Maltesers!

In keeping with the cake's archaeological theme, Pauline also presented Richard with a shiny new leaf trowel to cut it; appropriately, as Boles Barrow witnessed the first documented use of a trowel in British archaeology – by the Parker family from Heystesbury.

**Penny Ingham**  
BAHS





*Above: Richard Osgood MBE cutting the Boles Barrow cake with a shiny new leaf trowel, presented to him by Pauline Hedges. The trowel was especially appropriate as Boles Barrow witnessed the first documented use of a trowel in British archaeology, by the Parker family of Heytesbury.*

## CHANGE OF SPEAKER FOR 12<sup>TH</sup> MAY

Please note that due to unforeseen circumstances, there has been a change to our lecture programme. On Monday 12<sup>th</sup> May our speaker will now be author and historian Alan Turton who will be talking to us about “The Civil War in Hampshire.”

## **‘Don’t delay, enrol today’ The Women’s Land Army in Hampshire**

John Lander’s book of the same title has just been published by The History Press in advance of the 75th anniversary of the demobilisation of the Women’s Land Army in 1950. During WWII, Hampshire was in the forefront of the recruitment of Women’s Land Army members, known as ‘land girls’, with the county’s National Farmers’ Union Chairman claiming that ‘there were more land girls in Hampshire than in any other county in England’.



initially trained at the Hampshire Farm School in Old Basing, before relocating to Westley Farm House, Sparsholt. The four-week courses included livestock (cattle, pigs, poultry), horticulture (potatoes, cabbages, swedes), milking, ploughing, tractor driving and

On the 7<sup>th</sup> April, John gave a fascinating talk to BAHS about his research. The Women’s Land Army was operational from 1915-1919 and from 1939-1950. World War I began on 4<sup>th</sup> August 1914. This quickly led to a shortage of farm labour as men were conscripted into the forces. There was also a need to grow more food due to the threat to supplies from German submarines. By 1917, there were approximately 113,000 Women’s Land Army recruits working on farms, with about 3,500 in Hampshire, potentially the highest number of all the English counties.

The Land girls in Hampshire were



other mechanical aids, and domestic skills. The women lived on farms and hostels, worked very long hours, had very few days off, and earned just 18 shillings a week.

There were also strict rules about how to wear the WLA uniform, which included a light brown three-quarter length single-breasted overall coat.

In Hampshire, members the Women's Land Army could be assigned to the 'Horse Remount Depot' on the Broadlands Estate near Romsey. From here, more than 300,000 requisitioned horses were transported to the Western Front via Southampton.

With the advent of World War II, the WLA re-formed. The minimum age was 17, and the Membership Certificate stated:

*"You are now a member of the Women's Land Army. You are pledged to hold yourself available for service on the land for the period of the war. You have promised to abide by the conditions of training and employment of the Women's Land Army; its good name is in your hands. You have made the home fields your battlefield. Your country relies on your loyalty and welcomes your help."*

The women were paid directly by the farmers for a 50 hour week in summer, and 48 hours in winter, with one day off each week, and one weekend off in four. In 1941, 'land girls' were only entitled to one day's holiday every four months, although some farmers were more generous. Two years later, when demand



**John Lander, author of 'The Women's Land Army in Hampshire' cuts Pauline Hedges' Women's Land Army cake. The cake's 'ploughed field' is made of chocolate icing, complete with tiny spades in place of forks.**

for land girls still exceeded numbers coming forward to join the Women's Land Army, the entitlement was increased to one week per annum. By all accounts it was not an attractive proposition, and less favourable than that of other females working in other war-related occupations.

During World War II, there were at least 17 WLA hostels in Hampshire, all with strict rules. Women were also billeted with farmers' families.

By early 1944, there were 80,000 land girls serving nationally, and 1,039 in Hampshire. The women often worked alongside POW's (20,000 Italians and Germans).

Their responsibilities included: milking, horticulture, grain harvesting, poultry, thatching, tractor driving, and dealing with foot and mouth disease. There were two separate branches: 72,000 women serving in



Agriculture, and 8,500 serving in the Timber Corps, which was set up in 1942 to help source and prepare wood which was urgently needed for pit props and telegraph poles. These women became known as the 'Lumber Jills'.

World War II ended in 1945, but it was not until 2014 that the Women's Land Army and Women's Timber Corps Memorial was unveiled at the National Arboretum Alrewas, Staffordshire (see photo, left).

John's book is priced at £15.99 + £2.10 postage, or people can collect from John if they are close by:

The Old School House, Gravel

Lane, Barton Stacey, Winchester, SO21 3RQ. Tel: 01962 761705.

Or email John at [jandplander@btinternet.com](mailto:jandplander@btinternet.com)

The book is also available on Amazon.

# Basingstoke and the First Car Journey

by David Hopkins, Hampshire County Archaeologist



*A left-hand drive, tiller steered, solid tyre 4hp P Panhard-Levassour  
(sketch by David Hopkins)*

At about 9.30 on the morning of 11th July 1895 the first petrol driven motor car journey started at Micheldever station, the vehicle having been imported from France and unloaded there off the railway. Its destination was the home of its owner Evelyn Ellis, in Datchet, and his passenger was Frederick Simms. They cut from the station across to what is now the A30, pottering in past the Wheatsheaf and the Sun Inn. At 11 o'clock they passed through Basingstoke, up Winchester Street and Winton Square, passed Joice's Yard where the workers glimpsed the invention that would eventually put them out of business, across the market place and off down London Road, to cross the river at Black Dam, no doubt astounding the citizens of Basingstoke with their first ever sight of a horseless carriage.

The slow climb up past Crabtree Plantation to the high ground and the relief of the drop down into Hatch at 11.30 perhaps prompted their first stop which was at the Kings Head at Hatch (now called The Hatch) for refreshments and a meal: the first car journey comfort break. The Hatch is the great, great, great grandfather of all those roadside diners.

The full journey was 56 miles and took eight hours and 14 minutes, arriving at Ellis's riverside home 'Rosenau' in Datchet at 5.40pm. Of the journey, we have an account by Frederick Simms in a letter to 'The Saturday Review', 11th July 1895:

"I started on Friday last week with my friend, Mr Evelyn Ellis, from Micheldever, which is one station from Winchester on the London and South-Western line. Datchet was our destination. We set forth at exactly 9.26 a.m., and made good progress on the well-made old London coaching road. We passed at 11 am through Basingstoke and arrived at Maplederwell Hatch at 11.20 am, where we stopped to refresh ourselves and the engine, the refreshment of the latter consisting of cooling water. We left [there] and its astonished inhabitants at 11.50, arriving at Blackwater at 1.32. It was a very pleasing sensation to go along the delightful roads towards Virginia Water at speeds varying from three to twenty miles per hour, and our iron horse behaved splendidly. There we took our luncheon and fed our engine with a little oil. Going down the steep hill leading to Windsor we passed through Datchet and arrived right in front of the entrance hall of Mr Ellis's house at Datchet at 5.40, thus completing our most enjoyable journey of 56 miles, the first ever made by a petroleum motor carriage in this country in 5 hours 32 minutes, exclusive of stoppages and at an average speed of 9.84 mph."

"In every place we passed through we were not unnaturally the objects of a great deal of curiosity. Whole villages turned out to behold, open mouthed, the new marvel of locomotion. The departure of coaches was delayed to enable their passengers to have a look at our horseless vehicle, while cyclists would stop to gaze enviously at us as we surmounted with ease some long hill. Mr Ellis's motor carriage is a neat and compact four-wheeled dog-cart with accommodation for four persons and two portmanteaus. The consumption of petroleum is little over a halfpenny per mile and there is no smoke, heat or smell, the carriage running smoothly and without any vibration."

“We were not without anxiety as to how the horses we might meet would behave towards their new rivals, but they took it very well and out of 133 horses we passed only two little ponies which did not seem to appreciate the innovation. On our way we passed a great many vehicles of all kinds [i.e. horse-drawn], as well as cyclists.” Of this concern the local newspaper reported: “Is there fear of accident? It need not be apprehended that this new vehicle, if it becomes popular, will cause any dangerous alarm to horses. Already accustomed to the incidents and surprises of everyday street traffic they would soon become as indifferent to horseless carriages, silent and unobtrusive, as they already are to bicycles.”

### **What of the car?**

It was a left hand drive, tiller steered, solid tyre 4hp P Panhard-Levassour, a pre-eminent early French car maker from Paris. It was made to Evelyn Ellis’ specification but based on the design which had won the world’s first ever motor race, Paris to Bordeaux and back to Paris, in June 1895. He had ordered it in June 1895 at a cost of £200 (£33,000 today), and it was powered by a twin cylinder Daimler engine. The engine was front-mounted followed by a clutch, a centrally mounted gearbox and final drive to the rear axle. This ‘système Panhard’ became standard until the widespread adoption of front-wheel drive cars in the 1960s and is still common on larger cars.

In later years this car continued its life as a domestic car and its engine was also used to power a pump for watering the lawns and in case of fire. It was also said to have been used for demonstrations by the village fire brigade. The stables at Rosenau were converted to store the car, complete with a sunken inspection pit. Ellis called it his garage from the French word ‘garer’ meaning to store, probably the first use of the word. The car was given to the Science Museum in 1910 by the RAC and is still on display. By the end of 1895 it was estimated that there were 14 or 15 cars on Britain’s roads, and by 1900 perhaps around 700 or 800. By 1930 there were a million private cars, 10 million by 1967 and 41 million in 2023.

### **The law**

Ellis was concerned that the law relating to motor vehicles was slowing down the development of road transport in this country and so this, his first journey, was in part to challenge the establishment. The law, designed primary for steam traction engines, required a man with a red flag to walk

in front of any driven vehicle and the speed limit was 2mph in town, and 4mph in the country. This journey, in contravention of that limit, was at an average of almost 10mph without a man and flag. Ellis had hoped to make a test case and hasten the repeal of the law but he was not stopped, and the law was repealed anyway in 1896 when the speed limit was raised to 12 mph. This was celebrated with the Emancipation Run from London to Brighton on 14 November 1896 in which Ellis participated in his Panhard, and which is now the London to Brighton run.

### **What about the man?**

The Honourable Evelyn Ellis, born 1843 and died 1913, was a British motoring pioneer. He became one of the first directors of the Daimler Motor Company in Coventry and was one of the founders and vice chairman of the RAC. In February 1896 he gave H.R.H. the Prince of Wales, later Edward VII, his first drive in a car. His local motoring was reported by the Windsor & Eton Express:

“If anyone cares to run over to Datchet they will see the Hon. Evelyn Ellis of ‘Rosenau’ careering around the roads, up hill and down dale, and without danger to life and limb, in his new motor carriage which he brought over a short time ago from Paris where they are in pretty frequent use. Can it be easily driven? We cannot say that such a vehicle would be suitable for a lady, unless rubber-tyred wheels and other improvements are made to the carriage, for a firm grip of the steering-handle and a keen eye are necessary for its safe guidance. But for gentlemen they would be invaluable, especially if they were used, as they are on the Continent, by doctors and commercial travellers. What is its cost? Such a one as that owned by the Hon Evelyn Ellis would cost £200, and for long journeys its maintenance would be from ten pence to a shilling an hour. It is a splendid hill climber and climbs at a faster pace than a pedestrian can walk. A trip from ‘Rosenau’ to Old Windsor, up Priest Hill and descending the steep, rough and dangerous hill on the opposite side, past the workhouse and through Old Windsor back to ‘Rosenau’ within an hour demonstrates how perfectly under control this carriage is, while the sensation of being whirled rapidly along is decidedly pleasing.”

### **His passenger**

His passenger and navigator was Frederick R Simms, a mechanical engineer, businessman, prolific inventor and motor industry pioneer, who

coined the words “petrol” and “motorcar”. Although English, he was born on 12 August 1863 in Hamburg. In 1889 at the Bremen Exhibition he saw a small rail-car with a small self-contained engine made by a man called Gottlieb Daimler. They became friends. Daimler’s engine evolved into a two-cylinder V engine fitted to a motor car of Daimler design, which was exhibited at the 1889 Paris Exhibition. This attracted the attention of Messrs. Panhard and Levassor, who began to manufacture automobiles of their own in 1891 using this Daimler engine.

Simms acquired the British rights for Daimler engines and the Daimler agency proved so successful that in 1893 Simms founded the Daimler Motor Syndicate with plans to build Daimler engines in this country. Then in October 1895 the British Motor Syndicate paid Simms £35,000 for his Daimler patent rights. Simms went on to found the Automobile Club in 1897, which became the Royal Automobile Club (RAC) in 1907.

In conjunction with German engineer Robert Bosch, Simms invented, developed and patented the Simms-Bosch ignition magneto which enabled engine designers to precisely time the ignition of fuel because it was tied to the rotation of the engine. In 1900 Simms set up Simms Manufacturing Company Ltd Bermondsey and then moved the business in 1902 to Welbeck Works, Kilburn where they made Simms-Welbeck cars, lorries and marine engines, fire engines, agricultural vehicles, military vehicles (he designed and built the first ever armoured car), guns and aeronautical devices until about 1908. In 1913 Simms started Simms Motor Units Ltd to sell and repair particular dynamos and magnetos. During World War I it became the principal supplier of magnetos to the armed forces. During the 1930s the factory developed a range of diesel fuel injectors and in World War II the company was again the principal supplier of magnetos for aircraft and tanks, as well as dynamos, starter motors, lights, pumps, nozzles, spark plugs and coils.

Frederick Simms died on 22 April 1944 aged 81. The car industry that developed in Britain can be said to have begun through his efforts and he is regarded by some as the father of the British motor industry. And on July 11<sup>th</sup> 1895 he passed through Basingstoke in the town’s first encounter with a horseless carriage and took his motoring breakfast - Britain’s first ever motoring breakfast - at the Hatch where I too have enjoyed hot coffee and a full English breakfast as an homage.

## Edith Alice Weston (1883-1956) Basingstoke's First Woman Mayor

Roger Ottewill



**Figure 1: Mrs Weston in her Mayoral robes (courtesy of Hampshire Cultural Trust)**

Edith Alice Weston, who was destined to play a pivotal role in the political life of Basingstoke from the 1920s to the 1950s, was a Northumbrian by birth. As it was put in a newspaper obituary, 'she was always very proud of her Northumbrian associations.'<sup>(1)</sup> Born on 11 November 1883 in Rothbury her maiden name was Clarke and, as recorded in the 1891 and 1901 census returns, her father, Robert, was an 'Officer in the Inland Revenue Office'.<sup>(2)</sup> 'Educated privately in West Hartlepool she became a school teacher' holding posts in Scotland and Beverley, Yorkshire.<sup>(3)</sup> In 1907 she married Thomas Peter Weston, who had been born in Sussex, and moved to Hurstpierpoint. At the time of the 1911 Census his occupation was

recorded as that of 'Customs, Excise and Pensions Officer (1st Class)'. By then the couple had two daughters, Iris and Hazel, and the family were living in Sheffield.<sup>(4)</sup> In 1914 they moved to Basingstoke, presumably because Thomas had secured a post in the town.

To begin with, the 'fighting spirit' associated with Mrs Weston was evident in her being a 'militant suffragette'. Votes for women having been partially secured in 1918, a year later she joined the Labour Party, and subsequently 'served as chairman of both [the] local and divisional parties'.<sup>(5)</sup> She initially stood for election to the Borough Council, as a Labour candidate, at a by-election held on 23 November 1920, with the

*Hants and Berks Gazette*, simply commenting that she was ‘the first lady to be nominated for a seat in the Basingstoke Town Council.’ For her part:

Mrs Weston contended that women should be on the Town Council because many women paid rates as householders and many did so through their husbands. A great deal of Town Council work was housekeeping on a large scale, and it would be all the better looked after if they had a few mothers as well as fathers on the Council. Questions affecting health, housing, child welfare and education appealed especially to women.

However, their interests were not restricted to these aspects of service provision and she went on to mention the need for ‘sanitary dustbins’ for the collection of refuse and for the supply of ‘pure and clean milk’. She also addressed the issues of higher rates and made the point that since Labour had been represented on the Town Council they had not been raised at all while ‘the county rate which was levied not by Labour men, but chiefly by Tory landlords had gone up enormously.’<sup>(6)</sup>

Despite her vigorous campaign, on this occasion she was soundly defeated. That said, of the unsuccessful candidates she secured the highest number of votes (see Table 1).

Table 1: Results of Basingstoke Borough Council 23 November 1920

| Name                            | Note | Votes | Outcome     |
|---------------------------------|------|-------|-------------|
| Charles Bowman                  | ---  | 1379  | Elected     |
| Thomas Cuthbert<br>Chesterfield | ---  | 1345  | Elected     |
| Robert Geoghegan                | ---  | 1265  | Elected     |
| Edith Alice Weston              | Lab  | 531   | Not elected |
| George Robert Munday            | Lab  | 442   | Not elected |
| Arthur Frederick Smith          | Lab  | 390   | Not elected |

Source: *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 27 November 1920, p.5.

Undeterred, she stood without success on two further occasions, at the annual election of 1921(7) and at a by-election held on 26 January 1924.(8) Her first success came at the annual election of 1929, when the two Labour candidates were both elected (see Table 2), the other being Russell Howard.

Table 2: Results of Basingstoke Borough Council 1 November 1929

| Name                    | Note       | Votes | Outcome     |
|-------------------------|------------|-------|-------------|
| Russell Henry Howard*   | Lab        | 1402  | Elected     |
| William Gordon Hubbard* | Con        | 1185  | Elected     |
| William Edward Ward*    | Con        | 1103  | Elected     |
| Edith Alice Weston      | Lab        | 981   | Elected     |
| Charles Myland*         | <i>Ind</i> | 792   | Not elected |
| Eric Dudley Smith       | Con        | 782   | Not elected |
| Edward Elihu Miller     | Con        | 711   | Not elected |

\* = sitting councillor seeking re-election

Source: *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 9 November 1929, p. 6.

Once elected to the borough council ‘she quickly identified herself with its work ... [becoming] Chairman of the Library and Museums Committee and holding that post until her death.’(9) During her council service, she served on all the main committees and ‘for considerable periods was Chairman or Vice-chairman of the Health and Baths Committee.’(10) When re-elected in 1932, she topped the poll (see Table 3).

In addressing the electors following her re-election, Mrs Weston commented that:

... when she was elected three years ago she made up her mind that she would do whatever she had to do on the Council as fearlessly, honestly, and unbiasedly as possible. She also made up her mind to work for three things – housing, employment and health ... She thanked them not only for the honour they had paid her but far more for the honour they had paid to their mothers, wives and daughters in electing a woman on the Council.

Table 3: Results of Basingstoke Borough Council 1 November 1932

| Name                        | Note    | Votes    | Outcome     |
|-----------------------------|---------|----------|-------------|
| Edith Alice Weston*         | Lab     | 16<br>36 | Elected     |
| Russell Henry Howard*       | La<br>b | 15<br>29 | Elected     |
| William Edward Ward*        | Co<br>n | 14<br>67 | Elected     |
| Frederick Kenneth<br>Jordan | Co<br>n | 13<br>01 | Elected     |
| Francis James Lewis         | La<br>b | 12<br>31 | Not elected |

Source: *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 4 November 1932, p. 6.

1934 she ‘broadened her electoral horizons’ by successfully standing for election to Hampshire County Council in the Basingstoke West division.(11)

Re-elected to the Borough Council again in 1935(12), her reputation was such that in 1937 she was appointed Mayor, the first woman to hold the post in Basingstoke (see Figure 1).

In proposing the toast to the new mayor, Lt. Cmdr. L.T.R. Fletcher Labour MP for Nuneaton, and formerly Liberal MP for Basingstoke, congratulated ‘the borough in showing itself to be progressive and modern

minded in electing a woman as Mayor.’ In her response, Mrs Weston pointed out that a town the size of Basingstoke was ‘like a big family, and one realised it especially when one looked around and saw so many friends. Basingstoke had many things which endeared it to the people who came to live in it.’ She went on to say that she would endeavour ‘to uphold the traditions of past Mayors of Basingstoke, and her own ideals of social service, and do her utmost for the happiness, welfare and prosperity of Basingstoke.’(13) In the autumn of 1938, she was unanimously elected to the aldermanic bench, ‘an expression of the goodwill of the Councillors and a tribute to the way she had performed her public duties.’(14)

At a dinner held to mark the end of her year of office, an ex-mayor of Reading in proposing the toast to Mrs Weston referred to her ‘being a fit and proper person as Mayor who had carried out her duties well and did the best she possibly could.’ While Basingstoke councillor, W.H. Mussellwhite, in making a presentation to her:

... said that he wished to express ... the very real and sincere appreciation of her colleagues on the Council and of the burgesses ... for the really splendid way in which she had carried out her duties. She had not had the advantage of having a Mayoress.(15)

Similar sentiments were expressed in the *Hants and Berks Gazette*. Commenting on her year as mayor it made reference to her being ‘very active and attentive to the many duties which she ... [had] been called upon to perform.’ One of the most prestigious was in July 1938 when she was called upon to welcome H.R.H. the Duke of Gloucester on his visit to the Boys’ Club and ‘introduce him to the principal officials of the Club.’(16)

In responding to the very fulsome praise she received at the aforementioned dinner, Mrs Weston referred not only to local matters, such as charities, but also to her role as ‘ambassador of Basingstoke’ through attendance at meetings held at ‘the Albert Hall, the Queen’s Hall, the Hampshire Society Dinner in London, and functions at Winchester, Eastleigh, Southampton, Andover, and Reading.’ Moreover, the deteriorating situation overseas had made the ‘work of the Council more international’, with appeals from ‘China, Czechoslovakia, milk for children

in Spain and for the children who are our guests in this country.’ In addition, she mentioned the requirement for Air Raid Precautions during the Munich Crisis and that one of the last documents she ‘signed as Mayor was an appeal from the Mayor of Canton ... protesting against the bombing of open towns.’(17)

By 1939 her husband had retired, but Mrs Weston was as politically active as ever. Indeed, between 1939 and 1945 she was the prospective Labour candidate for the Chichester constituency, transferring to the Basingstoke constituency for the 1945 Election. However, notwithstanding the Labour landslide, she was defeated by 18,700 votes to 13,763, but this represented a considerably increased share of the vote for her party. In 1946 she lost her seat on Hampshire County Council. Thereafter, she concentrated all her energies on Basingstoke, with her public service being recognised in 1950 with the award of an OBE.

In 1952, along with Russell Howard, she failed to secure re-election to the aldermanic bench.(18) However, the two were unopposed when they stood in the subsequent by-election and thus retained their seats on the Borough Council, albeit as councillors rather than aldermen. Re-elected in May 1953, she retained her seat in May 1956 when she once again topped the poll, a sure indication of her popularity.(19) Thus, she was a sitting councillor when she died a few months later on 27 September.

In reporting her death, the *Hants and Berks Gazette* made much of her involvement in local affairs and her prominence within the Labour Party:

Her belief in that cause inspired her to fight, not only for its principles, but for practically any project which would materially or culturally benefit the community. With strong and definite opinions it was only natural that Mrs Weston should come into violent conflict with her opponents but she never knew when she was beaten and would fight on, usually achieving final success.

The use of the word ‘violent’ was perhaps unfortunate and ‘vigorous’ might have been better, but it reflected the intensity with which she fought for causes in which she strongly believed.

The report went on to highlight two institutions in the town which could be ‘regarded as unofficial memorials to her and ... [typified] her interest in

social welfare'. One was the 'Shruberry Maternity Home for the establishment of which ... [she] fought unremittingly, and which ... [had] proved so great a benefit to expectant mothers in the town and district.' The other was the Basingstoke Old People's Home.(20)

However, she was involved in many other organisations from, in the field of social welfare, the Women's Voluntary Services to the Family Planning Association and, in the cultural and sporting spheres, from the Basingstoke Society to the Town Swimming Club. She was, as the *Hants and Berks Gazette* put it, 'a very active woman'. Moreover, while a list of her activities reads 'very much like a catalogue ... it does not convey one half of her achievements or her personality.' Although a formidable woman she had 'high ideals' and her humanity shone through 'as she sought in a practical way the betterment of the social and cultural life' of her fellow citizens.(21)

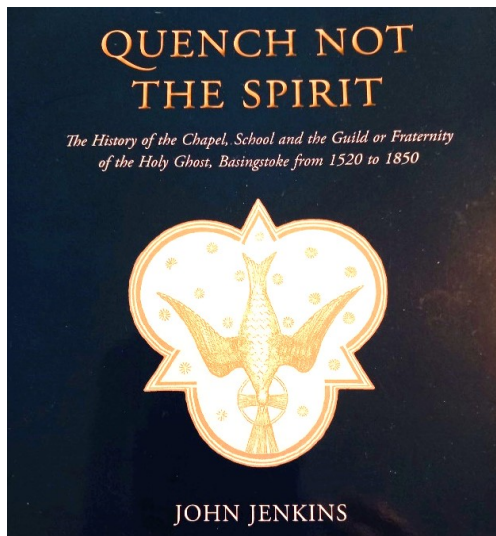
As Debbie Reavell of the Basingstoke Heritage Society pointed out, when commenting on a blue plaque for Mrs Weston, who lived in Crossborough Hill, 'as Basingstoke's first woman mayor ... she should be better known' (see Figure 2).(22)



Notes

1. *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 5 October 1956, p.9.
2. 1891 Census, RG12 4271. At the time the family were living in Hambleton, Northumberland. 1901. Census, RG 13 4685, since 1891 the family had moved to Castle Eden in County Durham.
3. *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 5 October 1956, p.9.
4. 1911 Census, RG 14 27796, their address was 52 Carter Knowle Road.
5. *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 5 October 1956, p.9.
6. *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 27 November 1920, p.5.
7. In 1922 she also stood unsuccessfully for election to the Board of Guardians.
8. *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 2 February 1924, p.4. There were three candidates and Mrs Weston came second with 619 votes to the victor's 943.
9. *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 5 October 1956, p.9.
10. *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 4 November 1932, p.6.
11. *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 9 March 1934, p.7. On a very low poll she won by 81 votes.
12. *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 8 May 1935, p.7.
13. *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 12 November 1937, p.6.
14. *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 16 September 1938, p.10.
15. *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 11 November 1938, p.5.
16. *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 4 November 1938, p.6.
17. *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 11 November 1938, p.5.
18. *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 23 May 1952, p.4.
19. *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 8 May 1953, p.1 and 11 May 1956, p.1.
20. *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 5 October 1956, p.9.
21. *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 5 October 1956, p.9.
22. D Reavell, 'Flashback Thursday' "Town's first female mayor, Edith Weston", *Basingstoke Gazette*, 8 August 2024, p.20.

## BOOKSHELF



A new publication, **“Quench not the Spirit - The History of the Chapel, School and the Guild or Fraternity of the Holy Ghost, Basingstoke from 1520 to 1850”**, by John Jenkins, is a most welcome addition to what is known about this site.

The ruins in the old cemetery at South View are a familiar landmark. Thomas Hardy noted them as he passed through Basingstoke on the train to London; Turner ran off a quick sketch, and George III’s topographical survey of his realm

produced a charming bucolic painting.

The history of the two chapels runs through the great events of English history: the Papal Interdict in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and resulting Brotherhood; Sandys great chapel, worthy of the burials of English Garter Knights and Barons; the religious upheavals of the Reformation, which effectively condemned Sandys’ beautiful chapel to a steady decline, briefly rescued under Philip and Mary, whose Charter of 1556 re-established the Guild and school – giving the town its grammar school, which survived in other locations until 1972.

During the Civil War, the schoolhouse was damaged and doubtless neglected. There is a lapse in the Wardens’ Accounts as well. There is a revival of interest in these ‘old stones’ during the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century, when antiquarian interest becomes fashionable. Then, there is some restoration and interest in the chapels for their historic value.

What is new in John’s beautifully produced book is a timeline of the chapels from 1520 – 1878, setting out the progress of their decline; work done using techniques such as photogrammetry to ‘read’ the armorials on the two fast-eroding surviving tomb slabs, and ground penetrating radar

(GPR) to seek beneath the chapels to discover three separate crypts, which are identified as Sandys and Cufaude family burials. John has also analysed the Wardens' Accounts from 1558 to 1653, providing evidence for the state of the Holy Trinity Chapel – demonstrating when the remarkable Flemish painted glass was removed, where it was taken and how the greater part ended up in The Vyne Chapel. The Herald's Visitation of 1686 has provided evidence of the layout of some parts of the ruined Holy Trinity Chapel.

Clear appendices provide coloured illustrations and photographs of the results of the scientific work, as well as ground plans evidenced from drone images. The book provides a permanent record of what could be lost to memory in years to come.

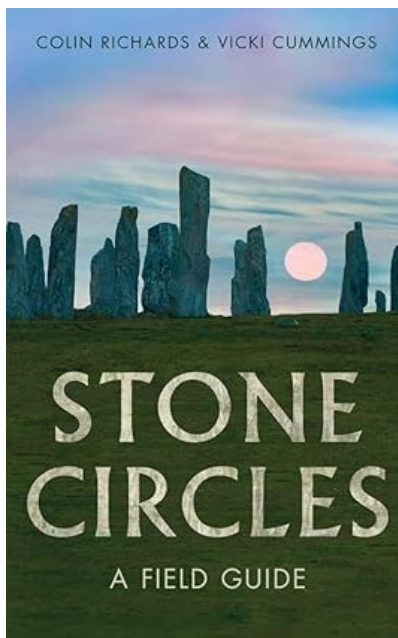
The book is available from The Willis Museum.

*Debbie Reavell*

## **STONE CIRCLES A FIELD GUIDE**

**By Colin Richards & Vicki Cummings**

**Yale University Press, 2024, RRP £30**



This easy-to-read guide is a welcome follow up to Aubrey Burl's original 1995 'Guide to the stone circles of Britain, Ireland and Brittany'.

From Stonehenge and the Ring of Brogdar to the Rollright Stones and Avebury, the British and Irish Isles are scattered with the enigmatic stone circles of our prehistoric ancestors. Although there have been many theories to explain them, to this day there is no consensus about their purpose.

The authors chose to examine 424 key stone circle sites in Britain and Ireland. Organised by region, the book sets out the features of these megalithic monuments, including their landscape

position, construction, and physical properties. Each entry also includes clear and detailed instructions for visiting and locating each site, as well as handy tips for things to look out for.

Our very own Ginny Pringle was a major contributor to this book, particularly for sites in south west England including Soussons Common stone circle on Dartmoor, which is considered to be the kerbing of a cairn as opposed to a free-standing stone circle. It has 22 low closely set monoliths forming a circle c8.5 m in diameter. Inside is a cairn, with a cist at its centre. It was found to contain two coils of human hair. The original excavator considered this to be a later deposit involving witchcraft but given the preservative qualities of the peat, this may be an actual early Bronze Age deposit

“Stone Circles, a field guide” was on the short list for the Current Archaeology book of the year 2024, and it certainly deserves this accolade. Beautifully illustrated with photographs, maps, and plans, and featuring cutting edge research, the authors present new insights on the chronology, composition, and roles of different circles, and transform our understanding of the sites.

*Penny Ingham*

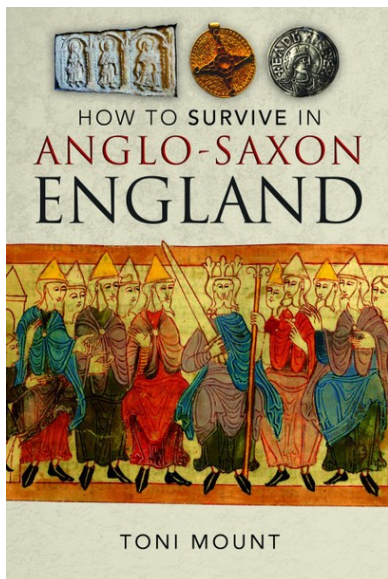
## **HOW TO SURVIVE IN ANGLO SAXON ENGLAND**

**Toni Mount, Pen and Sword, 2024, RRP £22**

The Early Medieval period encompassed almost 600 years of immense political, social and religious change. ‘How to Survive in Anglo Saxon England’ offers an accessible and entertaining introduction to this complex and much-debated period of history.

The opening chapter explores how and why these northern European migrants came to settle in Britain. Particularly interesting is the author’s theory that when the Roman legions left, they took with them huge numbers of British men seconded as auxiliaries, so few, if any, warriors remained. With no infrastructure for raising a militia, the island was virtually undefended and ripe for the taking.

Drawing on a wealth of recent archaeological discoveries and scientific advances, the first half of the book delivers on its promise. Written in a



light-hearted, easy-to-read style, there are chapters on social structure, home and family, the conversion to Christianity, language, poetry, the law, and health and welfare. Useful tips for time travellers include the importance of making ourselves known when entering a village or, as a foreigner, we will be held responsible for any crime. And if we are unfortunate enough to catch ‘watery-elf disease’, we shouldn’t be overly concerned. The Anglo Saxons believed many ailments were caused by bad spirits, but those itchy spots are what we would call chicken pox today. (However, perhaps we shouldn’t dismiss every

Saxon healer as a ‘quack’. In 2015, scientists at Nottingham University recreated a herbal recipe created by Bald, a ninth century monk, and were astonished to discover it wiped out cultures of the superbug MRSA!)

The second half of the book is less of a ‘how to survive’ guide, and more a straightforward historical account, beginning with King Alfred’s battles against the Danes in the ninth century, and culminating with King Harold’s defeat at the Battle of Hastings in 1066. Both halves are so distinct in approach, it is almost as if two separate books have been combined.

Despite this niggles, this immaculately researched and beautifully presented book is a delight. Highly recommended.

*Penny Ingham*

**And last but not least.... A shout-out for all our BAHS publications, including our two latest releases, *The Basingstoke Cornfield Murder* by Bob Clarke and *The Early Story of Old Basing* by Mary Oliver. You can find all the details and buy copies via our website at: [Publications – Basingstoke Archaeological and Historical Society](#)**

## BASINGSTOKE YAC REPORT - APRIL 2025



Gosh, Easter already! Luckily membership remains a steady 20 – and our waiting list has managed to increase to a massive 36! Someone’s talking about us! January saw Luisa deliver her first ever session, with Medieval Mayhem. She even brought along some great little costumes to dress up in. Sadly none of them fitted the grown ups, so we had to use our imaginations...never mind. The children were all really engaged and loved the jeopardy of waiting to see if they would die at the end. Fun stuff!

February’s Cave Art session was at Worting Scout Hut – thanks for the loan, David (Hopkins)! In this session the YACsters had the opportunity to learn about the differences between mobiliary and parietal art, became familiar with the terms geoglyphs, petroglyphs and pictographs, and learn about the spread and similarities of cave paintings throughout northern Europe and beyond. This was swiftly followed by a crawl through our darkened cave system (tables covered with tarps!), complete with ‘burning’ hearth for light, where the children could then create their own cave art using earth tone pastels. The results were impressive! These were then ‘signed’ by the children spraying paint over their hand, to leave an outline hand print in one corner. The whole thing was a lot of fun and, as usual, we ran out of time to do more!

We were lucky enough to have David Hopkins take the March session as we were transported back to Basingstoke during WWII. The volunteers all dressed up – Paul and Luisa looked amazing as they managed to fit into tiny uniforms and David gave us a brilliant insight into the type of measures that were put in place to protect us during the war – many of which you can still see evidence of today. These are what David beautifully describes as ‘touchstones’. There is so much that still surrounds us and we pay it no heed.

Our delayed April meeting (clash with Easter) will be going over some archaeological theories, including how crop marks are formed and how to spot them from the ground and the air.

*Nikki Read Co-Leader, Basingstoke YAC*

# BASINGSTOKE ARCHAEOLOGICAL & HISTORICAL SOCIETY



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## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Lectures are at Church Cottage at 7.30pm.

### Monday 12<sup>th</sup> May

The Civil War in Hampshire

*Alan Turton, historian and author*

### Monday 2nd June

AGM followed by:

East Anglia and the Arrival of the Anglo Saxons

*David Whiter, BAHS member*

### Saturday July 26<sup>th</sup> to Saturday August 16<sup>th</sup>

STANCHESTER EXCAVATION

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You can find out more about BAHS on our website:

[www.bahsoc.org.uk](http://www.bahsoc.org.uk)

Or follow us on Facebook:  [\(20+\) Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/archaeologyhistory)

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